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BRITONS AT BAY



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HENRY CHARLES MOORE

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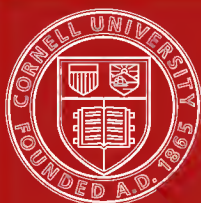
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BRITONS AT BAY



The *phoongyee* turned up his bowl, so that some of its contents were emptied into the midshipman's hands.—P. 246.

Britons at Bay

*THE ADVENTURES OF TWO MIDSHIPMEN
IN THE SECOND BURMESE WAR*

BY

HENRY CHARLES MOORE

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ILLUSTRATED BY J. JELlicoe

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BRITONS AT BAY

CHAPTER I

CAPTURING A STRONGHOLD

"THE licking we gave them the other day doesn't seem to have frightened them much," Arthur Drayton, midshipman on H.M.S. *Fox*, said to his chum and fellow-middy, Harold Millett.

"They're cheekier than ever," Harold replied. "That's the sixth boat with a flag of defiance that I've seen go by in the last ten minutes."

As Harold spoke he pointed to a long many-oared Burmese war-boat which shot past, close to land, displaying ostentatiously a red ensign with a white peacock. The flag of peace, which had not been seen for many days, was a white ensign with a red peacock.

"If I were the Commodore," Arthur declared, "I wouldn't have any more parley with the rascals. They've been insulting our flag and ill-treating our countrymen

for years, and now, instead of giving them a jolly good thrashing, we're demanding compensation and getting insulted for our pains every day. Why don't we land and capture the town and take all the compensation we want?"

"The Commodore will do what is right," replied Harold, who was not so excitable and headstrong as Arthur. "British interests are safe enough in his hands."

"I should think they were. I didn't mean to suggest that they were not. The Commodore is a grand fellow, and it would be an honour to be blown to smithereens or go to the bottom in the same ship with him. He knows what he's about, and will make the Burmese rascals sorry they were so cheeky before he has done with them. Did you notice how stern he looked when he received the last Burmese message?"

"Rather! He looked as black as thunder even before he read it."

"The way in which the message was brought was enough to make him look black. He sent four of our fellows ashore with a letter for the King of Burma's general, and instructions to demand a reply. The Burman pretended, however, that he was very busy just then, and promised to send one. He did, and, to insult us, chose for his messenger one of the filthiest coolies that ever I saw. And the rascal came out to us in a boat dirty enough to make a cat sick. I should like to know what the message was."

"I can tell you. I heard it translated to the Commodore. It said that the Burmese were tired of seeing our ships moving about the river, and that if we wanted to fight why did we not land and do so."

Arthur expressed his astonishment at the latest piece of Burmese impudence by indulging in a prolonged one-note whistle. Then he asked, eagerly, "What did the Commodore say?"

" 'Well, gentlemen,' he said, 'we have offered them peace, and they have refused it. Now they offer us war, and we will not refuse it.' "

"Bravo, Commodore! If I had been there I should have cheered."

"And got it hot for your pains. Hallo! there go some more flags of defiance!"

"We'll haul them down before long, my boys," Arthur said, addressing the distant enemy, "so make the most of them while you've got them."

"I wonder if they'll defend them fiercely," Harold said.

"Of course they will. I dare say they love that old peacock as much as we do our old flag. But they'll have to part with some of them all the same. I am going to capture one at least. Aren't you?"

"I'll try to."

"Well, of course that's what I mean."

Now although Arthur and Harold talked lightly of capturing the enemy's flags, and were yearning for the

war to begin in earnest, they were not boys who knew nothing of the realities of war. During the last few weeks their frigate had been fired on several times by the enemy's batteries, as it was tugged up and down the river, and they had seen comrades shot down right and left of them. Moreover, they had accompanied a small force sent ashore to storm a mud fort, whose guns were doing considerable damage to the flotilla. It was captured after a stubborn defence, and Arthur and Harold were among the first to enter it. Both fought bravely and gloried in the knowledge that they had done something towards avenging their murdered countrymen, tortured and slain by the barbarous King of Burma. They knew—every man aboard the flotilla knew—that the only way to protect English traders from the attacks of the conceited and ferocious Burmese was to capture Rangoon and make it a British possession. The English had captured it in 1826, but had restored it to the Burmese at the conclusion of peace. If it were captured again it would not be restored. Every sailor and soldier in the force felt confident of that, and all were anxious to take part in winning for England such a famous, or rather infamous, town.

But Admiral Austen, who was Commander-in-Chief of the expedition, was possessed of a humane desire—which Napoleon lacked, but which is common to all our great sailors and soldiers—to prevent unnecessary bloodshed.

Before proceeding to extreme measures, he endeavoured

to obtain all that he required by peaceful methods. He sent a deputation ashore to the King's Rangoon representative to request compensation for the Englishmen robbed, ill-treated, and killed by the Burmese. Moreover, he demanded that the instigators and perpetrators of the butchery should be arrested and executed publicly. And he also insisted upon some guarantee being given that, in future, the safety of Englishmen residing in Rangoon should be assured.

To these demands the Burmese gave ambiguous replies ; a sure sign that they had not the remotest intention of complying with them. Then the English admiral and General Godwin, who was in command of the troops, threatened to bombard the town, but delayed doing so for some days in order to give the Burmese ample time for reflection and repentance. Unfortunately, however, this delay was regarded by the Burmese as a proof that the English were afraid to attack them, and, puffed up with that belief, they became more aggressive and insulting than before. But their days of blustering conceit were soon cut short, for, finding that further delay would be a useless waste of time, Admiral Austen decided to attack the town at once. But, first, he sent word to the British subjects in Rangoon to quit the city and come on board. The majority obeyed promptly, but some sixty people, anxious to save their property, delayed their departure. These were seized by the Burmese and thrown into prison.

On April 11, 1853, the British ships opened fire on the stockades on both banks of the river, and the sailors and soldiers cheered again and again as one fort after another was blown to ruins. When scarcely a yard of the river defences was left standing, Admiral Austen went ashore to take stock of the country, and Arthur and Harold had the good fortune to be among those who accompanied him. Their task of setting light to the jungle was one that they enjoyed thoroughly, in spite of the tremendous heat from sun and fire. It was dangerous work, too, for many of the more reckless Burmans were watching the invaders from the shelter of the jungle, and when any one approached it they fired. Arthur and Harold had very narrow escapes. To put an end to that danger the Englishmen fired a volley into any portion of jungle they were about to set alight.

After two or three hours' hard work the seamen returned to the *Fox*, having cleared the shore for some distance of anything that could afford cover for the enemy. And throughout the night a close watch was kept on the clearing, to prevent any stockades being erected. But no sign of the enemy could be seen. Evidently they intended to reserve themselves for a fight inland.

At daybreak on the following day the landing of the troops commenced, and, in a few hours, some five thousand soldiers of the Queen were on Burmese soil. With them was the Navy Brigade, which included, among some

hundred and twenty jovial tars, Arthur and Harold. They knew that they were in for a big fight now, and if they did feel just a little bit nervous they took very good care not to let any one be aware of it.

Once on land no time was wasted. The advance towards the great Shway Dagon Pagoda, the stronghold of the enemy, was begun at once. But before the British force had proceeded little more than a hundred yards, the enemy's guns opened on it from a formidable stockade about half-a-mile inland. This stockade blocked the way to the Pagoda, and its capture was imperative. So it was stormed, and taken, in the gallant, fearless fashion characteristic of our glorious army.

The road to the Shway Dagon Pagoda was now comparatively clear, and the General would have pushed forward and attacked it at once but for the heat, which was terrible. Two officers, accustomed to the climate of India, and many of the rank and file were struck down by the sun and died on the field. Many others were insensible, while the gallant and victorious storming party were completely exhausted. But that is scarcely surprising when it is remembered that the troops engaged were not supplied with clothing suitable to the climate. Many of the brave fellows had to fight wearing shakoes and leather stocks!

General Godwin saw at once that to push forward would be madness, and decided, therefore, to halt where he was.

Arthur and Harold, who were both rather chubby-faced boys, were by no means sorry when they heard the "halt" sounded.

"Hot?" Harold asked, as he wiped his face with his pocket-handkerchief.

"Don't I look like it?" Arthur answered. "At any rate, I feel like a candle in an oven. Oh, for a bottle of ginger-beer!"

"Or a swim."

"Or a frost. I should just like a good tuck-in at ice-pudding, and then go to sleep on an iceberg. Wouldn't it be scrumptious?"

"I'd prefer a change of clothing. The perspiration is oozing out of every pore."

"Poor thing."

"Phew! You ought to be court-martialed for that. But I'll forgive you this time."

"Jolly good of you, I'm sure. I'll stand treat to you when we get back to Devonport. By Jingo, shan't we have something to yarn about when we do get home?"

"It's much too soon to talk about that, Arthur. We've got a jolly tough job on hand, and some of us will never see old England again. That pagoda is a very formidable place, and being the chief temple in the land the Burmese will defend it bravely."

"Very likely. They made a plucky fight to-day—a much better one than the General expected. But it was a wretched shame that you and I weren't in the fun. I

shall be awfully savage if we're kept out of the next affair. I wish to-morrow would be quick and come."

"To-morrow never comes."

"Yes it does, so don't you try to be clever. Just because you are two inches taller than me——"

"Three inches, please."

"That was six months ago. I've grown since then and you haven't."

"Grown cheeky."

"Well, that's better than growing conceited. Three carrotty hairs on your chin isn't much to be conceited about."

"They aren't carrotty."

"Oh! But if you don't believe me, ask——"

"I won't ask anybody."

"That's because you're frightened they wouldn't be able to see them at all. I shouldn't have noticed them if you hadn't told me they were there."

Harold moved away in a huff. Arthur and he often had little tiffs, but their ill-humour never lasted more than a day. On this occasion it lasted barely an hour, for both of them were eager to be friends, knowing that in a few hours they might be parted never again to meet on earth. That thought was impressed upon them many times, during the night and the following day, by seeing many of their comrades shot down by the desultory fire of the enemy concealed in the jungle. This period of enforced inaction was very wearisome to the force, and every man of

it experienced a feeling of relief when the morning of the 14th arrived. At five in the morning they were under arms, and the advance on the great Pagoda began soon afterwards. From the first it was very evident that the enemy intended to contest every foot of ground. Stockade after stockade was defended with great vigour, only, however, to fall into the attackers' hands. Soon all were captured but the Pagoda stockade. To reduce this, the heavy guns were now brought into position and opened on it. The Burmese artillery returned the fire, and, getting the range quickly, did considerable execution among the British troops, which, in consequence of there being very little ground cleared of jungle, were crowded together. The position was getting serious for the British, when, fortunately, their heavy battery demolished the fortifications that guarded the eastern gate of the Pagoda and gave an opening for the attackers. It was taken advantage of speedily.

The storming party, headed by the Royal Irish, advanced steadily to the hill on which the great Pagoda stood, the enemy crowding the walls, shouting threats and pouring a terrible fire into them. But the gallant British troops, English and native, were not to be stopped, and, to the dismay of the enemy, they reached the roughly-cut steps which lead up to the Pagoda itself. The next minute the Royal Irish were rushing up, the other regiments following and striving to pass them. It was a race for the glory of being first in the enemy's stronghold, and the guns,

muskets, and matchlocks of the Burmese might have been mere pea-shooters for all the notice that the stormers took of them. There were many foully murdered and tortured Englishmen to be avenged that day, and not a man of them forgot it. Possibly the Burmese remembered that they deserved little mercy from the English, for, as the first of the Royal Irish reached the top of the steps, they turned and, rushing madly across the Pagoda platform, sought to escape through the other gates. Some got away, others, at bay, died a soldier's death.

In a few minutes the huge Pagoda platform was crowded with flushed, panting British soldiers, and when they knew that this magnificent temple, with its gorgeous shrines, massive images of Buddha, quaint gongs and tinkling bells, was theirs they made the place ring with three mighty English cheers.

Arthur and Harold, of course, cheered as lustily as they possibly could. They were in excellent spirits, for their ambition to take part in a real battle had been gratified completely. Neither had received a scratch, although both had some very narrow escapes as they scampered up the rugged steps in the wake of the Royal Irish.

"Hot work, Arthur, wasn't it?" Harold said, as they ceased cheering and gazed around them at the novel scene.

"Rather! Hallo, what's that sticking out of your jacket?"

"A trophy! A flag of defiance," and, as he spoke, Harold pulled out the Burmese flag and exhibited it.

"Oh, what a lucky chap you are. How did you get hold of it?"

"When we got in here I saw a fat little Burman standing over there waving it about and shouting like a kid in a cold bath. 'I'll trouble you for that, sir,' I said, politely, and ran at him. He bolted like a cat with a dog after it, but I stuck close to him and was almost on him when he dropped the flag. I didn't worry about him any more. The flag was all that I wanted."

"I wish I could get one, Harold. A Burmese flag of defiance would look prime in our hall at home. Hallo! what's up now?"

They ran across the Pagoda platform to discover what the sudden outburst of firing meant. A small force of the enemy had made a desperate effort to recapture their stronghold, but were met with a fire that drove them back to seek cover.

"They must be dislodged and dispersed," said the General, and ordered the Navy Brigade and the Royal Irish to do it. With a hearty cheer the brave tars and the equally brave Irishmen ran down the hill helter-skelter, anxious to impress upon Mr. Jack Burman that Great Britain had had enough of his impudence.

Their determined faces struck terror to the hearts of the Burmans, and when sailors and soldiers were still some yards away they sprang up from their places of shelter and disappeared quickly into the jungle. Many escaped, but a good number were taken prisoners, and some were killed.



“I was almost on him when he dropped the flag.”

"Harold! Harold!" Arthur shouted suddenly, as the sailors were searching among the tangled undergrowth for hidden Burmans, "here are some fellows with a flag of defiance. I must have it."

"Come along, men!" Harold said to three or four sailors who were near him. "Let us help Mr. Drayton get that flag."

"Aye, aye, sir!" they answered, and struggled through the jungle in the direction of the party with the flag. But before they could get near them another gang of Burmans sprang from their place of concealment and attacked them. The sailors were far outnumbered, but, fighting with cheery determination, they soon equalized matters, and before long the enemy were in full flight.

Now Harold was some distance ahead of his men when they were attacked and knew nothing whatever of the affair, so intent was he on keeping Arthur in sight. Being very agile, he got through the intervening jungle with comparative ease, and was soon at his friend's side.

"They're getting puffed," Arthur declared joyfully. "We'll soon have the flag."

Harold glanced behind him, and found, to his astonishment, that none of his men were in sight.

"We're quite alone, Arthur," he said. "Is it wise to go on?"

"I don't care a cat's whisker whether we're alone or not. I'm going on. Two Englishmen are a match for five Burmans any day."

"I didn't say they were not," Harold answered, as they rushed along. "But suppose we come across some more of the Burmese?"

"We must chance that. I want that flag, and I mean to have it."

"But we shall get an awful wiggling when we get back. Let's chuck it up and look after our men. I'll give you my flag if you like."

"Don't want it. Look here, Harold, if you're funky, say so, and I'll go on by myself."

"Funky!" Harold repeated scornfully. "I'd pull your ear for two pins."

"Sorry I haven't got them with me. I'll give them to you when we get back."

"If I have any more of your cheek I'll get that flag and keep the two of them."

"Will you?" Arthur answered, and sprinted for all he was worth.

Harold dashed after him, and the two raced across the open ground that lay before them. They reached the jungle together, a splendid dead heat, and were rushing into it, when suddenly the ground gave way beneath their feet and they fell with a flop into a soft-bottomed pit. For a few moments they were too much astonished to speak or move. Then Harold said anxiously—

"Are you hurt, Arthur?"

"No. Are you?"

"I'm a bit shaken, that's all."

"What have we fallen into?"

"A trap. This is one of the pits which the Burmese dig to capture stray enemies. I've read about them often, and it was awfully silly of me not to remember that such things existed."

"I suppose they'll kill us now?"

"Very likely. And yet I can't understand why the bottom of this place is so soft. Apparently they did not want us to be killed in the fall."

"Oh, blow it! I believe I know what they mean to do with us—torture us! What do you think?"

"It's no good guessing what's going to happen. Let us wait and see."

"Oh, I can't sit here doing nothing. Let us try to escape. If you stand on my shoulders, you'll just be able to reach the top and climb out."

"I don't think it is any good trying to escape. When a man sets a bird-trap he generally hides somewhere at hand to see that the poor little prisoner doesn't escape. I have no doubt that there are a lot of Burmans watching this place."

"At any rate let us try."

"You must stand on my shoulders then. I'm not going to get out of this hole and leave you in it."

"You could haul me up!"

"Could I! You forget what a little podge you are."

"I don't get a chance to do that, for you remind me of it every day of my life. But I don't care if I am fat, for I

shall soon become skinny in this scorching land. And as for you—well, I shall be able to take you home and sell you for a hop-pole. But I wish you wouldn't talk so much. Let's get out of this quickly. I'll stand on your shoulders, and when I'm out I'll get you up somehow or other."

So they set to work to make their escape. First they gathered together the elephant grass that lay thickly on the ground, and piled it at one side of the pit. Then Harold got on top of the heap, and a few moments later Arthur clambered on to his shoulders. But even then Arthur could not quite reach the top of the pit. His hand was about an inch from the strong jungle-plant that he wanted to grasp.

"Hurry up!" Harold said sharply, for Arthur was not a light-weight to have on his shoulders.

Arthur hesitated no longer but sprang upwards, his shove-off sending Harold flat on his back. But Arthur caught hold of the branch and held it tightly. Then he began to hoist himself up, but when his face appeared above ground several Burmans rushed towards him and signed to him to descend again.

"It isn't likely," he said. "The place isn't furnished well enough to suit me."

Of course, the Burmese did not understand one word of what he said, but when they saw him continue to raise himself they knew that he intended to be defiant. Some of them, therefore, took up bamboo-caness and hit him, not very hard, across the fingers. But still he held tight.

Then they hit him harder, but, in spite of the pain they caused, he would not release his hold. The Burmese, who had so far been rather good-humoured, now grew angry, and, kneeling down on the ground, struck Arthur about the face so severely that he was compelled to leave go, and fell to the bottom of the pit. He was bruised, but his dignity was more hurt than his body.

"Now what are we going to do?" he exclaimed, when he had finished threatening the Burmese with dire punishment for daring to treat him so unceremoniously.

"Nothing," Harold answered, "but sit here and wait to see what happens."

"How beastly dull. If they are going to kill us, why don't they do it at once? Perhaps they are inventing some new kind of torture."

"Don't think of such things. I'm going to have a sleep. I'm horribly tired, and I should think you were too. Some sleep now will do us a world of good, and make us more fit to cope with whatever turns up."

"Well, I'll have a try, but I don't suppose I shall get a wink."

In spite of that assertion Arthur was fast asleep in five minutes, and a little later Harold was in the same condition. They had had a long and arduous day, and it is not surprising that, in spite of their uncongenial abode, they slept soundly for more than six hours. In all probability they would have slept much longer had not a stir at the top of the pit awakened them.

It was dark, and for a few moments the two middies could not recollect where they were ; but a glance upward soon recalled to them their unfortunate position. Standing at the top of the pit were a number of Burmans, peering down into the darkness, evidently anxious to have a look at the prisoners. One man held aloft a flaming torch, whose light penetrated but dimly the gloom of the pit, but fell full on the faces of the Burmans, and gave the prisoners a good view of their captors.

"What are they going to do now, I wonder," Arthur said, as he rose and stretched himself. "Hallo, they're shoving a ladder down. Somebody coming down to polish us off, I suppose."

But Arthur was mistaken. For some minutes after the ladder had been lowered not a foot was placed upon it. Then Arthur and Harold noticed that the Burmese were beckoning them to ascend.

"Shall we go up?" Arthur said.

"Yes, certainly," Harold replied. "We can't be worse off up there than we are down here. I'll go first."

He started up, and Arthur followed him closely. The manner in which they were received startled them greatly. As each arrived at the top a lasso was thrown over him and drawn tight as it reached the middle of the body, pinioning his arms to his side. And at the same time another man removed his cutlass.

"The beginning of the end," Arthur muttered to Harold.

"I don't think so," Harold answered, "for our captors appear to be very good-tempered and anxious to be friendly."

"Well, I don't like friends who tie your arms to your sides. Hallo! what's this they are bringing to us? By my—by *your* beard, Harold, it's rice. Now that is a friendly sign; but how are we going to get the stuff into our mouths?"

They knew in a very few moments. They were to be fed with a long spoon!

"It puts me in mind of old times," Arthur remarked, after he had swallowed about half-a-dozen spoonfuls. "This old fellow reminds me very much of my nurse, but I like his skirt much better than the ones she used to wear. I wonder why these fellows wear skirts. Do they feel such old women?"

"Don't be rude, Arthur. Remember they are doing us a good turn."

"Rude! I couldn't be if I tried. Could I, cockalorums?"

The Burman, seeing that he was addressed, smiled benevolently, and shook his head to show that he did not understand English.

"There, Harold!" Arthur exclaimed with extreme delight, "Jack Burman confirms what I said—I could not be rude!"

Arthur having cleared one tray of rice, his good-natured feeder ran and fetched another, but there was a limit even to Arthur's appetite.

"No, Monsieur, Señor, Sahib, or whatever you call yourself, I'll have no more, thank you. Englishmen, you know, or ought to know, are not constructed on the same lines as ostriches."

"What does he know about ostriches?" Harold joined in. "Surely you don't think that they inhabit Burma."

"Now it is you who are being rude to the old gentleman. It would never have occurred to me to imagine that he didn't know what an ostrich was like simply because he hadn't seen one. But I'll accept your apology on his behalf."

"Don't chatter so much. Apparently they're going to march us off now."

"Where to?"

"Goodness only knows."

"Never heard of the place. I wonder what they'll give us for the next meal?"

"Rice, I suppose it will always be rice."

"What a prospect. Maggots and tar was bad enough at school, but maggots alone for every meal—ugh, words fail me."

"For the first time since you were a baby, then. Hallo! the man in charge is making signs to us to march."

The Burmese, who numbered about twenty, now closed on Arthur and Harold, and the party marched onwards through the jungle.

"Every step takes us further from the old ship," Arthur said sorrowfully, when they had travelled a mile or so of

the tangled jungle. "I wonder if we shall ever get back to her."

"I hope so. When we get to know our captors better, I dare say we shall have a chance of escaping. They'll relax their watchfulness after a time—when they find that we appear reconciled to our lot."

But day after day passed without the Burmese showing any signs of decreased watchfulness of their prisoners. They continued to treat them most humanely, much to the surprise of Arthur and Harold, who had heard, on board the *Fox*, many gruesome tales of Burmese ferocity.

Harold frequently made earnest endeavours to discover whither they were being taken, but his enquiries, framed in turns in English, French, German, Latin, and Greek—all but the English equally bad—never produced anything but head-shakes from the Burmans.

"Try them with Scotch," Arthur suggested, "you've been to Scotland."

Harold did try, and this time even Arthur did not understand him. Whose fault that was, was discussed for some time, but not decided.

And now, finding that it was useless to attempt to discover anything from their custodians, Arthur and Harold became rather low-spirited. Arthur continually bestowed uncomplimentary names upon himself for having, by his eagerness to capture a flag of defiance, placed them in such an unenviable position.

CHAPTER II

ON THE ROAD TO SLAVERY

ONE day, when Arthur and Harold had been in captivity for about a fortnight, they discovered something that filled them with the greatest indignation. It was about noon, and the party were resting for an hour or two after a long weary trudge through the jungle. Arthur and Harold had been fed with rice and fruit, and were now lying half asleep on the ground, thinking of their happy days on board the *Fox*.

Suddenly Arthur heard a voice whisper, "My lord, I speak your honourable language."

For a moment or two Arthur thought that he was dreaming. But again he heard the voice, "My lord, I speak your honourable language."

Greatly surprised, he looked to the left of him and saw a young Burman squatting a yard or two away. He was smoking a huge green cheroot, and appeared as if he were quite unconscious that Arthur was so close to him. Arthur was puzzled. Did that Burman speak to him, or had he, after all, been dreaming?

Soon the Burman removed the cheroot from his mouth, and held it in front of his face, so that his hand concealed his mouth. Then he spoke, softly and looking straight in front of him.

"Listen, my lord," he said, "but let it not be seen that you are listening. My countrymen do not know that I speak your honourable language. If they did they would not let me come near you."

Then he paused, evidently expecting some question.

"How is it that you speak English?" Arthur whispered, and rolled a few inches nearer the Burman.

"My lord, I am Bah Pay, a servant of the good missionary at Rangoon, who taught me. I have been his servant since I was very small boy—ten years ago. Now he is in prison."

"In prison? Whatever for?"

"Because, my lord, he is an Englishman. When the great lord on the English war-boat say, 'Come at once on board,' my master say 'No,' and he stay on shore at his house. Then, my lord, some of my countrymen forgot all the good that my master had done in Rangoon. They seized him and put him in prison. It was a vile thing to do. Perhaps he is dead now. Who knows?"

After a few moments' silence, during which the Burman glanced around to see that no one was watching them, Arthur said, "Where are my friend and I being taken?"

"To Ava," was the whispered reply.

"But why are we going there?"

"Can you not guess, my lord?"

"No. Tell me quickly, please."

"My lord, you are being taken to the Queen. She has commanded that some Englishmen shall be captured and given to her for slaves."

"Slaves!" Arthur exclaimed; and in his excitement spoke so loudly that several Burmans turned and looked at him. The young fellow who had been talking to him got up immediately and walked leisurely away, saying to his friends in Burmese, "The white dog has said something to me in his foolish language. Why do the stupid *kalas*¹ speak words that wise men cannot understand?"

"What's up?" Harold asked. Arthur's exclamation had roused him from his semi-slumber.

"Something awful," Arthur answered. "I have just discovered what they are going to do with us."

Harold turned slightly pale.

"Torture, and then execute us, I suppose," he said.

"Worse than that. They are going to make us slaves."

"Slaves! Never! What makes you think that?"

"I've just been told so. That fellow with the pink-and-white turban speaks English. I have been having a whispered conversation with him, and he declares that we are being taken to Ava to become the Queen of Burma's slaves."

¹ Foreigners.

Harold was as horrified at the news as Arthur had been.

"The fellow may have been having a bit of fun with you," Harold said, "and yet I cannot help thinking that he spoke the truth. His statement explains the behaviour of our captors throughout. I have often wondered, and so have you, why they treated us so well, feeding us and looking after us more as if we were honoured guests instead of prisoners. Now the reason is very plain. They are anxious to present us to the Queen in the best bodily condition possible."

"The scoundrels! I've a jolly good mind to starve myself just to spite them."

"Don't think of doing that. Whatever happens let us always, if possible, eat enough to keep in good condition, so that if we do see a chance of escape we shall be fit enough to make the most of it."

"That's all very well, but think of the degradation of being slaves to a filthy cheroot-smoking, betel-chewing, brown woman. I should never hold up my head again, even if I lived to be a hundred."

"Oh, that's bosh. It will, as you say, be very degrading, but it will reflect in no way upon our honour as officers and gentlemen. In fact, I rather think it will be better for us to be at Ava than wandering about in the jungle, for our fellows, unless the Burmese give in, will probably push up the river and take Ava. If they do that, we shall be re-captured."

"Or killed on the approach of the flotilla. I wonder what the woman will make us do when she gets us?"

"Nothing very terrible, I imagine. You must remember that, being white, we shall be a valuable novelty. No doubt the Queen will be very proud of us, and make us wait upon her and be in evidence on every state occasion. Possibly, if we succeed in pleasing her dusky Majesty, she will promote us to the rank of Spittoon-bearer."

"She shan't promote me to it. I won't have anything to do with her beastly spittoon."

"It is a great honour to be a Spittoon-bearer, I've heard. Of course it appears rather absurd to us, but the titles of 'Knight of the Garter,' or 'Companion of the Order of the Bath' would sound equally comical to the Burmese."

"That may be true, but nevertheless I won't accept any of her honours, and I'll do all I can to make her wish that she had never seen me. I'll play all the pranks I can think of and——"

"She'll put an end to them by having your head cut off."

"Don't care. I tell you that I won't submit to being a slave. And you won't when the time comes. You're very fond of trying to talk like a chaplain or a lawyer, but I'm jolly certain that you never forget you're an English sailor."

Still excited, Arthur jumped to his feet; and, facing the Burmans, sang at the top of his voice—

"Rule Britannia, Britannia rules the waves,
Britons never, never, never shall be slaves."

The grand old blood-stirring song roused Harold from his usual calmness.

"Once more, Arthur," he said excitedly, and, standing side by side, the two British middies made the clearing ring with—

"Rule Britannia, Britannia rules the waves,
Britons never, never, never shall be slaves."

Their custodians, starting from their squatting postures, stared at the lads in astonishment. Only one among them—the missionary's servant—knew the meaning of the words they sang, but all guessed from the look of determination on the singers' faces that it was a song of defiance.

So they gathered round them and resumed the march at once. Their kindness and attention to the prisoners were not decreased, but they evidently feared a surprise, and kept a sharp look-out to guard against it.

For several days they pushed on steadily through the interminable jungle, but, to Arthur's disappointment, Bah Pay, the missionary's servant, appeared to shun him. Once, when no one was looking, Arthur beckoned him, but Bah Pay assumed a look of astonishment and then hastily turned away.

But later in the day, when the travellers were halting for a well-needed rest, Bah Pay threw himself down on the ground near Harold and puffed away at his cheroot in

silence. Soon he appeared to fall asleep, but Harold guessed that his slumber was feigned. He listened eagerly to catch any whispered words, and did not have to wait very long.

"My lord, can you hear me?" Bah Pay asked, very softly.

"Yes," Harold answered.

"It is good. To-day I speak to you because your honourable friend, the little English lord, is not careful. When I spoke to him he placed my life in great danger by speaking aloud."

"It was very foolish of him. I will be very careful. But how is it that your countrymen do not know that you speak English?"

"Because they are not Rangoon men, my lord. They are Ava men. If they were Rangoon men they would know I speak English, for everyone in Rangoon knows Bah Pay, the good missionary's servant."

"And are you quite certain that we are being taken to Ava to be made slaves?"

"Quite, my lord. My countrymen talk of it every day, wondering how much the Queen will give for each of you."

"Bah Pay, if you will help us to escape we will give you more money than will be your share of what the Queen gives."

"My lord, I do not want your money. I am the friend of all English people, and my heart would be glad if I could help you to escape. But it is foolishness to think

of it, for where could you go if I set you free? If you wandered about the jungle my countrymen would kill you, and if they did not find you the tigers and other fierce beasts would."

"But could you not escape with us, and lead us back to our ship?"

For a few moments Bah Pay was silent. Then he said, "Once I thought that to live in the jungle would be a life of happiness, but I have grown tired of it already, and if I get back to Rangoon I will never again leave it. We will escape."

"To-day?" Harold asked, eagerly.

"Perhaps. I will watch; and when I see a favourable opportunity I will set your arms free. But now, my lord, I must move away, for it would be foolishness for us to imagine that we are the only clever people in the jungle. Some one may be watching us."

Bah Pay now pretended to awake. He yawned, and stood up and stretched himself. Then he picked up his cheroot, and strolled over to his countrymen for a light.

When he had been gone some minutes Harold moved over to where Arthur was lying on a mat, sorrowfully wondering what his comrades on the *Fox* were doing.

"Arthur," Harold said, "I've a piece of good news, but don't show any signs of pleasure—several of those fellows are watching us. I've just had a talk with Bah Pay. He is going to help us to escape, and accompany us back

to Rangoon. When he sees a favourable opportunity he'll cut these ropes and we'll all bolt into the jungle."

"But do you think Bah Pay is to be trusted?"

"I do. I can't see that he has anything to gain by setting us free. Moreover, by doing so he runs a risk of being killed as a traitor. He says that he is the friend of all Englishmen, and I believe that he means it."

"Well, if he proves that he is our friend it will be quite sufficient. The remainder of our millions of countrymen are in no particular need of his friendship. All I hope is that he'll be jolly quick in setting us free. I'm sick of being a prisoner."

"So are most prisoners. Hallo! we're off again."

"Isn't it beastly monotonous? We trudge along for hours, then we sit down for an hour or two and then march on again. But I don't mind if, after all, we only manage to disappoint that presumptuous Queen. What awful cheek she must have to want Englishmen for slaves. I should like to tell her so."

"For your own sake I hope you won't have the opportunity, in case there may be an interpreter at her court."

The journey was now resumed, and the prisoners soon noticed that the Burmese were in very high spirits. They sang and laughed, and played practical jokes on one another as recklessly as if they were a pack of school-boys.

"I wonder what they are so happy about," Arthur remarked, after a good laugh at some of their pranks.

"They know that they are getting near the end of their

journey," Harold answered, "and feel that they have as good as got the Queen's reward."

That reply made Arthur very serious. He did not utter another word for quite half-an-hour. But both he and Harold were on the alert for Bah Pay's promised help. They expected it every minute, but at the end of the day they were still prisoners, and Bah Pay was sitting laughing and chatting with his countrymen, evidently on the best of terms with them.

At dawn, the following day, the march was resumed. For two or three hours nothing occurred to break the monotony of the journey, and, the novelty of jungle life having worn off, Arthur and Harold would have been in very low spirits but for Bah Pay's promise. When would he redeem it? That was the question they asked themselves again and again without being able to form any convincing opinion, for Bah Pay gave no signs whatever.

Arthur soon became impatient, and expressed his belief that Bah Pay was not to be relied upon, attributing his promise to a desire to keep them from making an independent attempt to escape.

"He's in league with his countrymen," he continued, "and I dare say they are all thinking how jolly well we have been humbugged."

"Well," Harold answered, "I don't agree with you. It's my firm opinion that Bah Pay is perfectly trustworthy, and that, when the right moment arrives, he will fulfil his promise."

"Perhaps what you call the 'right moment' will never arrive."

"Oh, yes, it will; so cheer up and wait."

As it turned out, their period of waiting was very brief. Scarcely had Harold finished speaking when there was a commotion in the jungle on the left of them, and, a minute later, some twenty or thirty Burmans rushed headlong into the beaten track and greeted the midshipmen's captors with wild delight. Evidently it was a chance meeting, and both parties appeared to enjoy it the more because it was so unexpected. For some minutes there was a scene of good fellowship and jollity, highly creditable to all concerned. But it did not last for long, and the innocent cause of its destruction were Arthur and Harold. At first the newcomers did not see the midshipmen, but when they did catch sight of them they set up a blood-curdling shout and rushed towards them. But their captors blocked the way, and, with threatening flourishes of their *dahs*, or swords, drove them back.

The leader of the newcomers now addressed the other party, and, judging from his dramatic actions and earnestness of manner, the subject of his speech was one of very great importance. Nevertheless it failed to make any impression upon the leader of the midshipmen's captors. He answered briefly, and evidently his reply was a curt refusal to the demand made, for no sooner did the other party hear it than every man, anger gleaming in his eyes, drew his *dah* and advanced menacingly on his country-



Bah Pay cut the ropes that bound them.—P. 37.

men. The next moment the air was filled with the clash of arms, shouts of defiance, and cries of pain. Both parties fought with the desperation of untutored people who fight for what they imagine to be a just cause.

Arthur and Harold, their arms tied to their sides, looked on in wonderment at the fierce conflict. Soon they became excited, and, remembering only the good actions of their captors, shouted hearty, but, to the Burmese, unintelligible words of encouragement.

"Bravo, nurse!" Arthur yelled, as the man who usually fed him sent a stalwart opponent lifeless to the ground.

That was the last that he or Harold saw of the fight, for the next moment both became aware that some one was behind them. Looking round, they beheld Bah Pay with a knife glittering in his hand.

He smiled reassuringly, and quickly cut the ropes that bound them.

"Now follow me," he said sharply, and darted into the jungle, Arthur and Harold following close on his heels.

CHAPTER III

ESCAPING THROUGH THE JUNGLE

FOR nearly an hour the fugitives pressed onward, without halting once to discover if they were pursued. Arthur and Harold were soaked with perspiration, and soon came to the conclusion that a flight through the jungle was not the most pleasurable of experiences. The undergrowth seemed to exist solely for tripping-up purposes, and both of them fell prostrate several times, tearing their already ragged uniforms and severely lacerating their hands. Nevertheless, they were game for another hour's run, if the exertion were necessary. From a precautionary point of view it was necessary, but Bah Pay was dead beat.

"My lords," he exclaimed, throwing himself wearily on the ground, "all my strength is exhausted. I must rest. If you continue straight on you will, no doubt, reach a village before nightfall. The news of the war has not yet reached these parts, and my countrymen will treat you well. Hurry on, my lords. Perhaps we shall meet again in Burma, but if not we shall come together in the kingdom where the good God reigns."

For reply, Arthur and Harold flung themselves down beside him. Bah Pay surveyed them enquiringly.

"A rest will do us all good," Harold explained.

"Yes, yes, of course it will," Arthur agreed. It was on the tip of his tongue to ask Bah Pay whether he was mad, to imagine for one moment that English sailors would forsake a friend, but he recognised that Harold's few words were more to the point.

"My lords," Bah Pay said, with evident gratitude, "it is good, it is very good of you."

"Bosh!" Arthur exclaimed, and then continued, "What I am dying to know is the origin of that fight."

"Yes, Bah Pay," Harold joined in, "tell us all about it, for it's a mystery to me why the two gangs should have been almost loving one minute and murdering each other the next."

"My lord," Bah Pay answered, promptly, "you and your honourable friend were the cause of it."

"Well, I guessed that much, but I cannot understand why we were."

"That, my lord, I will now make clear. The men who met us wanted to cut off your heads, for the King has offered to pay fifty rupees for every Englishman's head brought to him. For the heads of black soldiers who fight for Englishmen he will pay thirty rupees. But my comrades would not permit them to kill you."

"Then, Bah Pay," Arthur said, "your friends were not such a gang of rascals as I imagined."

"Probably," Harold remarked, "they expected to get more for us from the Queen than from going shares in the price of our heads."

"My lord, you speak wisdom. What you say is true."

"In that case, Bah Pay," Arthur said, "your friends are as big a set of scoundrels as I thought them all along."

Bah Pay smiled. Evidently it caused him no pain to hear his countrymen denounced.

"I should very much like to know which party won the fight," Arthur continued. "It was getting jolly interesting when we bunked."

"I wonder that you didn't stop and see it out then," Harold declared.

"What, and let you run away by yourself! A pretty state you would be in if you hadn't me to look after you."

Harold's sole reply took the form of a lump of soft earth, well aimed.

"Now," he said, after bobbing his head to avoid Arthur's return missile, "let us attend to business. We've escaped, but still we are in a very serious position, for as sure as we're alive those fellows will be after us in no time. I shouldn't be at all surprised to hear that they stopped fighting when they found we had skedaddled."

"It *was* a fine suck in for them," Arthur observed.

"Possibly," Harold continued, "they have patched up their quarrel and are pegging after us like—like——"

"Greased lightning," Arthur suggested.

"Oh, shut up. I don't want to be captured again, and I don't suppose that you do. Now the question is, how can we avoid recapture? Bah Pay, what do you think? Shall we get back to Rangoon in safety?"

"My lord, I think so. But it will be very many days before we reach it. We must make our way now to the Irrawaddy, and go down to Rangoon by boat."

"Then you think we shall not be recaptured?"

"My lord, I do. My countrymen will not think of searching for you in this direction. They will go straight on towards Ava, hoping to overtake us."

"Excuse me, Bah Pay, but I don't think that at all likely," Harold declared. "Surely they would guess that we would not be such awful jackasses as to make our way towards the city where we were to have been slaves."

Bah Pay smiled.

"My lord," he said, "you forget that my countrymen know that I am with you. They will say, 'Bah Pay is an artful fellow. He will lead the English *kalas* to Ava, and will get for himself all the money that the Queen promised.'"

"Evidently your countrymen do not think very highly of you, Bah Pay," Arthur remarked.

"They know what they would do themselves, and foolishly imagine that I am like them. But I am not."

"I'm glad to hear that. If you were like them you might be tempted to chop off our heads, while we were asleep, and take them to the King."

As he finished speaking, Arthur noticed that Harold, who was sitting slightly in the rear of Bah Pay, was glaring at him furiously. Then he saw his mouth silently frame the words, "You silly blockhead."

For a moment or two Arthur wondered what he had done to deserve the uncomplimentary title, but soon it occurred to him that Harold feared Bah Pay might be tempted to act in the manner he had mentioned. He hastened to repair the mischief.

"If you were inclined to chop off our heads, I'm afraid you'd have to wait until you were an old fossil before you'd find my friend and me asleep at the same time. We're sailors, and each has his watch."

Arthur fancied that he had atoned for his want of caution very neatly, and was, therefore, considerably annoyed to find that Bah Pay quite understood what he was driving at.

"My lord," the Burman said, reproachfully, "there is no reason why you should tell me that. I am your friend, and you could sleep as safely in my presence as if I were your father."

"Of course, of course," Harold replied hastily, wishing to get the subject out of mind. "We trust you implicitly."

"My lord, it is good to hear your words. Now, shall we continue our journey?"

"Certainly, if you feel all right again."

"Then, my lord, let us start."

The three fugitives immediately rose and trudged onwards, Bah Pay anxiously looking out for some sign of friends or enemies. They saw nothing of either, but when they had been plodding on for about half-an-hour or so they reached a wide beaten track, and Bah Pay was delighted to a noticeable degree.

"Are we near a village?" Arthur asked.

"That I cannot say," Bah Pay replied, "but soon we shall find plenty of clear water."

That was a very cheering piece of information, for Arthur and Harold were still unpleasantly hot, and longed for a good drink.

And in a few minutes they got it, for suddenly Bah Pay, who was hurrying ahead of them, turned and exclaimed joyfully—

"My lords, can you not see the water-pots? Let us run to them?"

He started off quickly, but the middies sprinted after him, and were close on him when he stopped in front of an open building by the side of the track, and pointed to several big jars of water.

"May we help ourselves?" Harold enquired

"Certainly," Bah Pay replied. "It is placed there for you."

Then seeing that Harold and Arthur looked mystified, and guessing that they knew nothing of the duties incumbent on good Buddhists, he said—

"My lords, drink as much as is good for you, and when

you are no longer thirsty I will tell you why those jars of water are placed here."

Arthur and Harold needed no second bidding. They took up the rough mugs that stood by the jars, and, plunging them into the water, filled them to the brim, and drank from them.

"That's the best drink I've ever had," Arthur declared, as he carefully replaced the mug.

"And so say I," Harold agreed.

"Now, my lords," Bah Pay said, as he finished a long enjoyable drink, "I will explain why this house and this water are here. I am a Christian, but once I was a Buddhist. Buddhism is the religion of my country, and although I hope that some day Christianity will take its place, I trust that the good deeds which Buddhism encourages will still be practised. This rest-house has been built, and these water-jars placed here, by some good man who is anxious to obtain much merit, so that when his deeds, good and bad, are weighed, at the end of his present existence, the good deeds will outweigh the bad. Then he will reap his reward by being born again, in a position of greater wealth and happiness."

"But," Harold said, "what would happen if his bad deeds outweighed his good ones?"

"He would be punished by being a much poorer man in his next existence. He might, also, be born blind or lame. And if he were a very bad man, he might even become a dog or some other animal."

"Then your countrymen do good deeds so that they may ensure their own happiness?"

"My lord, that is so. When the builder of that rest-house and the giver of these water-jars finished his work he did not think of the good they would do the travellers who passed along this path; he thought only of the good his actions would do himself."

"Well," Arthur said, "it's a fine thing for travellers, anyhow. The man who placed those water-jars here has won my everlasting gratitude."

"Much good that will do him," Harold remarked, but Arthur pretended that he did not hear.

Refreshed by their drink, the three fugitives stepped out briskly, and in about half-an-hour overtook a bullock-cart. Bah Pay at once entered into conversation with the cart-man, and obtained the information that about a mile further on there was a village. The cart-man was going there himself, and offered to give Bah Pay and the white *kalas* a lift.

When Bah Pay repeated this invitation Arthur and Harold accepted it immediately. Not because they were tired, but simply for the novelty of travelling in a bullock-cart. They found, quickly, that it was a novelty which soon wore off. The two bullocks were the most leisurely specimens of a lazy breed ever seen, and if an energetic tortoise had, by some extraordinary chance, been travelling in the same direction it might have overtaken them easily. Unlike his animals, the cart-man was full of energy.

He grasped a stout stick in his hand, and alternately prodded each bullock, delivering about sixty prods a minute and accompanying each one with an excited shout. At first Arthur and Harold thought that the man was giving himself a lot of utterly unnecessary exertion, but they soon discovered that such was not the case, for, when, on two occasions, the cart-man ceased his prodding and shouting for a few moments, to answer some questions of Bah Pay's, the animals came immediately to a standstill and would not budge an inch. It was only when the prodding and shouting were renewed that they deigned to move on.

But it was not the slow travelling alone that worried Arthur and Harold. It was the jolting that they objected to chiefly. And truly they had good cause for grumbling, for not only was the cart devoid of anything in the way of springs, but the big wooden wheels were not even round. They had the appearance of squares endeavouring to ape circles, or circles masquerading as squares. It can, therefore, be understood that each revolution of the wheels was accompanied by some half-a-dozen jolts, severe enough to make the ride very far from comfortable.

"Oh, bother this," Arthur exclaimed, at last, "I've had enough of it. I'm going to get out. Coming, Harold?"

"Wait a jiffey," Harold replied, and addressed himself to Bah Pay.

"I hope your countryman won't be offended if we get out and walk. It is not very comfortable riding in this cart."

"My lord, it is very uncomfortable," Bah Pay answered. "Let us all get out and walk. I will see that the cart-man is not offended."

So they all three alighted, and the cart-man smiled amiably, for Bah Pay had artfully complimented him on the splendid condition of his cattle.

"My lords," Bah Pay said, "let us not wait for the bullock-cart, but hurry on to the village. I have told the cart-man that we are about to do so."

Arthur and Harold nodded to the cart-man, and started off with Bah Pay at a pace that soon left the dreamy bullocks far behind. They reached the village in about a quarter of an hour, and marched into it boldly, Bah Pay having, by judicious pumping, discovered from the cart-man that no one in the neighbourhood knew anything of the war with the English. The reception which the villagers accorded the midshipmen confirmed this completely. Men, women, and children, all smiling, swarmed round Arthur and Harold, admiring their skin, criticising their clothes, and plying Bah Pay with questions as to who the white *kalas* were.

But Bah Pay, who had suddenly assumed most important airs, would give no information.

"Where is the head-man?" he asked, pompously, and the crowd turned immediately in the direction of the great man's house. The head-man was asleep when the travellers entered the village, but the excitement caused by their arrival aroused him, and when he discovered, in answer to

his enquiries, that two white *kalas* had come, he donned his best and brightest turban, changed his crumpled skirt for his new silk one, put some cheroots in his pocket, snatched up his betel-box, and hurried out to welcome the visitors. He met them a few yards from his own house, and at once invited them to return with him. Bah Pay accepted the invitation for the midshipmen, and in a few minutes the travellers were enjoying the head-man's hospitality.

Arthur and Harold quite relished the novelty of sitting on the floor, and having all manner of, to them, unknown fruit and sweets offered them. Arthur even accepted a betel-chew, but after turning it over in his mouth a few times began to feel sick. So he jumped up, rushed to the doorway, and spat it out among the crowd waiting to catch sight of them.

The head-man laughed heartily, and then tried to persuade him to accept a huge cheroot. But the size of it frightened Arthur, and he declined it, with many apologies.

When many polite speeches uttered by the head-man and his guests had been translated, Bah Pay approached the subject which was uppermost in the Englishmen's minds.

"My lord," he said, with a low obeisance, "the white *kalas* have lost their way. It is their desire to reach the river, and go back by boat to Rangoon. Will you appoint a guide to take them to the river, for I do not know the way?"

"I have heard the words you have spoken," the head-

man replied, "but why do you talk of the white *kalas* leaving, when they have only just arrived? It would be a disgrace to my village to talk of their leaving yet. When they have been here several days you may speak to me about it again."

Bah Pay at once translated the head-man's decision.

"What a wretched nuisance," Arthur exclaimed. "Can't you prevail upon him to change his mind?"

"My lord, I dare not try. He will not harm you, but I am a Burman, and if I offend him he will order me to receive some awful punishment."

After hearing that, the midshipmen's spirits sank, and the reception became a very tame affair, a fact which the head-man recognised sufficiently to bring it to an abrupt conclusion. But, before he did so, he informed Arthur and Harold that a roomy house had been placed at their disposal for as long as they cared to occupy it.

When the midshipmen saw the house, or hut, they were amused to find that it was far from agreeing with the description of it given by the head-man. Nevertheless, they were very thankful, for it was far superior to the majority of huts they had noticed on their way through the village. The little furniture it contained, consisting chiefly of mats and trays, was new, and the three rooms were brightened with palms and flowering shrubs.

"It might be worse," Harold remarked, as they finished their examination of the premises, "but——"

He stopped short for a moment, and then exclaimed, "Well, I'm blowed! Look there, Arthur."

Arthur looked in the direction indicated, and saw a dozen or so of fowls roosting on the top of the narrow six-foot high partition which divided the room from the adjoining one. They were awake, and were gazing down, with heads cocked on one side, at the three travellers.

"We've come into the fowl-house by mistake," Arthur exclaimed, when he saw them.

Bah Pay, believing Arthur to be serious, hastened to inform him that there was no mistake.

"This, my lord," he said, "is the house which the head-man set aside for you."

"Then if that's the case, why are those egg-layers here? We didn't invite them, so they must go."

As Arthur finished speaking he snatched Harold's cap from his head, and threw it straight at a dignified old cock perched in the centre of the party, knocking him backwards into the adjoining room, where he started chuck, chuck, chucking in a most indignant fashion. The hens, too, were horribly excited by Arthur's shot, and flew wildly about the rooms, colliding with each other, and then pecking each other viciously for not getting out of the way. Some of them tried to settle in most absurd places, such as the edge of trays and vases, with the result that the articles mentioned fell over, giving the fowls another shock. One hysterical old hen got so muddled up that, in her confusion, she settled on Bah Pay's head,

a proceeding which was strongly resented by the Burman. He wagged his head to shake her off, but in her hurry to escape from such an unsteady roosting-place she entangled her claws in his turban. The more she tried to free herself the more entangled she became. Bah Pay was quite willing, indeed very anxious, to release her, but she had got so terrified that she pecked his hands viciously. For some moments she flapped her wings, and chuck, chuck, chucked in a most despairing manner. It wasn't much fun for the hen, or even for Bah Pay, but to Arthur it was the most amusing thing he had witnessed since he was on board the *Fox*. He put a hand on each hip, and, throwing back his head, roared with laughter.

Now neither Arthur nor Harold was aware that there was a goat resting in the corner of that room, for it had escaped their observation when they were looking round the place. It was asleep then, but the fowls' uproar had roused it. Arthur's laughter simply exasperated it, and seeing that the noise came from a most curiously dressed man—it had never until then seen a European—it rose, with vengeance in its eyes, and, rushing forward, gave him a tremendous butt in the back. The force sent Arthur flying, but before he could understand what had happened the goat butted him again in exactly the same spot. Turning round quickly he discovered who his assailant was, and seeing a stick close by he snatched it up to defend himself.

And now Harold was enjoying himself. The sight of

the fowl struggling on Bah Pay's head, and the goat vigorously attacking Arthur in the rear, upset his gravity completely. He shrieked with laughter, and the goat heard it. Evidently the animal imagined that European laughter and attire were intended for a challenge to fight, and, being of a fighting disposition, no sooner did it notice Harold than it ran at him. Harold was quite unprepared for that. He had not even time to turn round. So he retreated hurriedly and fell backwards over a flower-pot. The goat was awfully astonished, but coming to the conclusion that the flower-pot had sided with his enemy he went for it, and smashed it to atoms. Then he retired quietly to his corner and lay down.

"All right, Harold?" Arthur enquired, as he vigorously rubbed the seat of his trousers.

"A bit bruised," Harold answered, as he rose to his feet. "You all right?"

"Yes. And you, Bah Pay?"

"My lord, I am," Bah Pay replied. Nevertheless, his face had been scratched in numerous places by the startled hen before she got free.

"It seems to me," Harold said, looking at the fowls, who were quietly going back to roost, "that we've lost this battle. I'm certain there are just as many fowls as when you interfered."

"So there are," Arthur agreed, after counting them, "I suppose they'll have to stop. And the goat also."



Harold, quite unprepared, fell backwards.

Harold and Bah Pay being of the same opinion, all three lay down for the night, and dreamt of fearful fights with birds and animals of such extraordinary appearance that the possession of one of them would have made a showman's fortune.

CHAPTER IV

A MYSTERIOUS DOG

SHORTLY after daybreak Arthur and Harold awoke from their troubled sleep, and, sitting up on their mats, gazed around. Greatly to their relief they saw that the fowls had already gone out for their early meal, and the bellicose goat was no longer present.

"But where's Bah Pay?" Harold exclaimed, missing the worthy Burman.

"My lord, I am here," Bah Pay answered, popping his head in at the door. "I have prepared for you a most beautiful breakfast."

When Arthur and Harold heard that, they flung off their rugs, and, jumping up, proceeded outside to see what was Bah Pay's idea of a beautiful breakfast. They expected that it would be something that would take away their appetite at one glance. But they were mistaken. Bah Pay had three fires burning, and on each was a pot boiling. Arthur lifted the lid of one and gazed in.

"Oh, I say!" he exclaimed, excitedly, "I believe it's boiled fowl."

"My lord, it is," Bah Pay said, with a smile of great satisfaction.

"And what's in the other pots?" Harold asked.

"There is another fowl in that one. In the other there are six eggs."

"Two apiece," Arthur exclaimed, joyfully. "Oh, what a feast we'll have. When will it be ready?"

"My lord, it will be ready in five minutes. I have only to boil the water for the tea; it has boiled once."

"Tea!" Arthur continued, in ecstasies. "Bah Pay, you're a magician. What are we going to have for dinner? Roast beef and Yorkshire pudding?"

But Bah Pay would not gratify his curiosity on that point.

"My lord," he said, "will you take out the eggs? Here is a spoon."

"No, no," Harold joined in, seizing the spoon. "Don't let him do it. He'll break them. I'll do it."

"I'm bothered if you will," Arthur retorted, making a grab at the spoon. But Harold being determined not to surrender it to him an exciting struggle ensued, both falling to the ground and nearly rolling into one of the fires.

"Take care, my lords," Bah Pay yelled, and the middies, being warned of their danger, thanked him and resumed their struggle, a few yards away.

"It would have been awful if they had spoiled the chicken," Bah Pay muttered, as he took out the eggs with

another spoon. "These sea-fighting Englishmen are very careless."

The struggle between Arthur and Harold resulted in the latter getting the former down and sitting on his chest.

"Will you give in?" Harold asked, emphasising his question by tweeking his helpless chum's nose, and Arthur, anxious to get out of such an undignified position, answered that he would.

"Now I'll take out the eggs," Harold said, as he walked towards Bah Pay, proudly waving the spoon above his head.

"My lord, it is too late," Bah Pay declared, with a shrug of his shoulders. "See, I have done it."

"Hurrah! Sold again, Harold!" Arthur laughed, and jumped about with joy, whereupon Harold threw the spoon at him and missed him. Bah Pay went and picked it up, and to prevent any more struggles for its possession put it in his pocket.

A few minutes later they sat down to breakfast, inside the hut. Arthur and Harold would have preferred to have breakfasted out of doors, but Bah Pay would not hear of it, explaining that if his countrymen saw them eating fowls they might become unfriendly. One of the Buddhist commandments is, "Thou shalt not destroy life," and the man who breaks it is regarded as a hopelessly bad character.

"My lord," Bah Pay continued, "I had to be very

careful, while picking and drawing the fowls, that no one saw me. I did it inside the house, and when they were ready to be boiled I carried them outside in the pot."

"But if no one will kill fowls, how did you get these?" Harold enquired.

"I killed them myself. While you and your honourable friend were asleep I pulled two of the fowls from their perch and wrung their necks."

"Two of the fowls that kicked up such a row yesterday?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And what did you do to the goat?" Arthur joined in. "Did you wring his neck?"

"No, my lord, I milked her."

"Was it a her?"

"Yes, my lord, that is her milk that you have in your tea."

Arthur looked at his tea rather suspiciously. Then he sipped it.

"It tastes all right," he declared, "but I shouldn't have thought that a fiery brute like that goat would have given milk. I should have thought paraffin-oil would have been more in her line."

"At any rate," Harold said, "the breakfast is a jolly good one, and we are very much obliged to you, Bah Pay."

"We are," Arthur agreed, "and we hope that you'll give us many more like it."

"My lord, if it is possible, I will do so," Bah Pay declared.

"Then we shall have them."

"Look here, Arthur," Harold joined in, "let us take care that we don't forget we are not here to enjoy ourselves. Our place is on the good old *Fox*, and the sooner we get back to her the better it will be for us."

"You're right, Harold," Arthur declared, "but how are we to get back? Bah Pay hasn't decided yet, and we are almost as helpless as a fly in a tumbler."

"The head-man of the village will assist us," Bah Pay assured them, "but we must not attempt to hurry him. Nevertheless, my lords, I will be very watchful, and if I discover any good way of escaping quickly I will tell you of it at once. To-day I will wander about the village talking to my countrymen. You must not come with me, for although you do not understand Burmese the people will not speak freely in your presence."

"We'll stay at home and mend our clothes," Arthur replied. "They want it badly."

"But we haven't any needles and thread," Harold reminded him.

"My lord, I will get you those," Bah Pay promised, and, going out, soon returned with some which he had borrowed from a neighbour.

For nearly three hours after Bah Pay had started out again, Arthur and Harold sat mending their dilapidated uniforms. For patching purposes they cut up and used the

flag of defiance, which Harold had captured at Rangoon and carried about with him ever since, concealed beneath his jacket. It was a great disappointment to both of them to have to put the trophy to such a use, but there was no help for it.

After finishing their tailoring, a job which neither of them enjoyed, they took two mats outside the hut and lay down in the shade of some trees to have a good rest. The natives, probably informed by Bah Pay that the English *kalas* did not like to be stared at, did not flock around them as on the previous day. The only visitor they had was a dog—a tall, thin, mud-coloured, short-haired animal such as Arthur and Harold had seen in Rangoon, prowling about the streets eating the refuse. Knowing these pariahs to be treacherous brutes, they were by no means pleased to see the dog coming towards them. They shouted at it, and picked up stones as if they intended to pelt it. They had done that many times in Rangoon, and on every occasion the dog had scuttled away in a terrible fright. But this dog exhibited no signs whatever of fear. He stopped short, but only to show his pleasure. He wagged his tail so vigorously that the hind part of his body wagged with it.

“That’s rum,” Arthur declared. “Here! Come along. Good dog.”

The dog barked, and made a frantic endeavour to still further increase the vigour of his tail-wagging.

“That’s the first time I’ve heard one of those brutes

bark," Harold remarked. "Somebody told me that they never did."

"This one is evidently an exception. Here! Good dog. Come along."

The dog gave one more bark and then bounded joyfully towards them. He jumped up, first against Arthur and then against Harold, and seemed as if he were trying his utmost to exhibit his delight at seeing them.

And Arthur and Harold, quite pleased with his affectionate greeting, patted him, stroked him, and made a big fuss of him.

"I wonder," Harold said, "why he doesn't object to us. Every other dog that we have met in this curious land has snarled at our white faces."

"He isn't much to look at," Arthur declared, "but he's the kind of dog that would stick to a fellow if he got into a tight corner. I vote we keep him."

"If he'll stop with us."

"Oh, he'll do that. Won't you, old boy?"

And the dog wagged his tail with renewed energy, as if he quite understood the question and was anxious to answer "yes."

After playing with the dog for five or ten minutes Arthur and Harold lay down again, for the heat was terribly trying. The dog lay a few yards away, with his nose beneath his front paws, but closely watching every movement of his new friends. When they had lain in that position for about half-an-hour, Arthur remembered that

he had a piece of dry biscuit in his pocket. It had been there a long time, but he had refrained from throwing it away, for fear that some day he might regret it. Now he took it out—for, with Bah Pay at hand, it seemed very unlikely that they would ever be hard pressed for food—and breaking off a piece threw it to the dog, who jumped up and devoured it eagerly. He broke off another piece, and as he tossed that to him he exclaimed, almost unconsciously, "Trust," and, to the astonishment of both Arthur and Harold, the dog stopped short, with his nose about a foot from the morsel. "Paid for," Arthur said, and the dog snapped it up in a moment.

Arthur and Harold gazed at each other in astonishment. The same thought occurred to both of them.

"Who taught him that, I wonder?" Arthur exclaimed, in a state of intense excitement. "An Englishman of course, but who is he, and where is he?"

"We'll have to find out," Harold answered, "but don't let us be too cocksure that there is one to find. Try the dog again. Perhaps he only did it by a fluke."

"Not he," Arthur declared, but he threw down another piece of biscuit and uttered the caution, "Trust."

Again the dog stood with his nose a short distance from the biscuit, but he had to wait twice as long this time before he heard the welcome words, "Paid for." But when they were uttered he was on it in a moment.

"Are you satisfied now?" Arthur enquired, triumphantly.

"Quite," Harold replied. "Let us see if he can do anything else. Here, fetch it."

As Harold finished speaking he flung a stick some distance along the track. The dog scampered after it, and quickly brought it back and placed it at his feet.

"Now let's see if he'll go to heel," Arthur suggested.

They walked on a few yards, the dog jumping up in front of them.

"Go to heel," Arthur commanded, and immediately he ceased his frisking about and went quietly to the rear of them.

"That settles it," Arthur declared. "There's an Englishman somewhere about here, and we must find him. Shall we follow the dog home?"

"We'd better not do that," Harold replied. "Bah Pay advised us not to go far from the hut."

"Then how in the name of goodness shall we find our fellow-countryman?"

"Let us write a letter to him and tie it round the dog's neck."

"That's not half a bad idea. Oh no, it isn't though. It's a beastly silly idea. Where are pen, ink, and paper to come from?"

"I have some blank paper in my pocket."

"Got any ink there as well?"

Harold disdained to reply.

"Have you a pen or pencil?"

"No, but I'll make a pen if you'll make ink."



Arthur uttered the caution, "Trust."—P. 63.

"Right you are then. The ink will be ready as soon as ever the pen is."

"It is ready now," Harold declared, and putting his hand into his pocket pulled out an old tooth-pick. "There is my pen," he declared triumphantly. "Now where is your ink? Is it ready as you promised?"

"Oh yes," Arthur answered calmly, "quite ready. I've got ten bottles of red ink."

For a moment or two Harold was half convinced that Arthur had gone out of his mind. Arthur noticed his troubled look and guessed his thoughts.

"All right, Harold," he said gaily, "don't look so blue. I'm all serene. Don't you twig where my red ink is kept? No? Why, in the tips of my fingers of course. I'll prick them and make the blood come."

"That's not at all a bad idea for you," Harold declared, patronisingly.

"If you had suggested it, it would have been a brilliant one—for you," Arthur retorted. "And now let us decide what we are going to write."

Harold concocted, immediately, an excellent letter, but Arthur declared that it was much too long. "I'm not going to be extravagant with my blood," he added, decisively.

"Perhaps you'd like to write the letter yourself?"

"I would. Give me the paper and toothpick."

Harold gave them to him.

"Now for business," Arthur exclaimed, and taking up

one of the needles which they had been using that morning, pricked the tip of one of his fingers, and as the blood oozed out dipped the toothpick in it. It was slow work writing with such materials, and Arthur had to prick two more fingers before he could finish the letter. But he was very proud of the result, and gazed at it admiringly. This is what he had written—

“2 englishmen are in this village and want to see the owner of this dog.”

“I didn’t put two in writing, or a capital E for Englishmen,” Arthur explained, “because it would have used up more blood than was necessary. Now I’ve done my share of the work. You do yours. Tie the letter round the dog’s neck and send him home.”

Harold obeyed, immediately.

“Go home,” they both shouted when the paper was tied securely on the back of his neck, and the dog started off with a rush. But before he had gone fifty yards he stopped short and looked round wistfully.

“Go home,” they shouted again, and, with a parting bark, the dog ran on and was soon lost to sight.

CHAPTER V

A VISIT FROM A HEATHEN GOD

FOR three or four hours after sending the dog away Arthur and Harold were too restless to settle down to anything. There were many ways in which they could have amused themselves had they been so inclined, but anxiety to make the acquaintance of the owner of the friendly dog prevented their thinking of anything else.

"I'm afraid that we made a mistake in sending the dog away," Harold said at last. "Perhaps his master is dead, and that was why he was so pleased to see us."

"Oh, I hope not," Arthur answered in great concern. "At any rate he is sure to come back to-morrow, if not to-day. If he comes back, and his master doesn't come with him, I vote that we stick to him."

"We'd better consult Bah' Pay about that. He'll be able to discover whether the dog has an owner. If he hasn't, of course we can keep him. But I hope that he has an owner."

"So do I, and I wish the fellow, whoever he is, would

hurry his stumps. I'm getting sick of waiting, and beastly hungry."

"Let us go inside then and finish off that piece of fowl."

"That's a jolly sensible suggestion. Come along."

But they did not eat much of the fowl at that sitting, for they had scarcely made themselves as comfortable as it was possible on their mats when a strange figure appeared at the door of the hut. Such an extraordinary looking man they had never seen, and, forgetting their manners, they gazed at him in astonishment. He was about five feet four in height, thick-set, and with a head big enough for a giant. But the extraordinary thing about his head was not its size; it was its colour, and that was red. Long red hair streamed down on to his shoulders, and red hair fell thickly over his forehead. His beard, which extended almost to his waist, was red also. He was a very hairy man indeed, and the only parts of his face not concealed by red hair were his nose and a small patch of flesh under each eye. And these hairless parts were reddish. His clothing was chosen, evidently, to match his complexion, for his jacket and *lungyi*, or skirt, were both red. And in his hand he held a red umbrella.

Harold was the first to recover from his surprise. "Who are you?" he asked, but not thinking for one moment that he would be understood.

"A god," the red man replied, in plain English.



“ Oh, walk in then,” Arthur said heartily.—P. 73.

"A what!" Arthur and Harold exclaimed together.

"A god, sir, a heathen god," the man answered.

"Oh, walk in then," Arthur said heartily, rising from his mat. "I'm the Prince of Wales, and he," pointing to Harold, "is Prince Alfred."

"Really?" the red man asked, looking first at one and then at the other.

"Yes, over the left."

The red man grinned extensively, and entered the hut.

"Do all the gods understand English as well as you do?" Harold enquired, as he pushed a mat towards the new-comer.

"Really, sir, I don't know," the red man answered, "because I've never met any of them."

"I suppose you can speak all languages?"

"Oh no, sir, I can only speak English."

"Then you are an Englishman!"

"Rather, sir."

"And the owner of that dog?" Arthur chimed in.

"Yes, sir. Fine dog, isn't he?"

"Well, he isn't much to look at, but he's jolly well trained. What's his breed?"

"Oh, he's a Siamese dog, sir. I got him when he was a pup. There are plenty more running about the streets, if you want one."

"But how is it that Siamese dogs are plentiful here?" Harold enquired.

"Well, sir, they ought to be plentiful in their own land."

"Certainly, but this isn't their own land. This isn't Siam!"

"Then what is it, sir?" the red man asked in astonishment.

"Burma, of course."

"Never heard of that place, sir. You don't mean Bermuda?"

"Oh no."

"Or Bahamas?"

"No. How long have you been here?"

"Two years, sir."

This reply sent Arthur into a roar of laughter. The idea of a man living in Burma for two years, and believing, all the while, that he was in Siam, struck him as being very funny.

"Stash it, Arthur," Harold exclaimed severely. "Perhaps our friend will tell us what made him think that this land was Siam."

"Well, sir, it was like this," the red man said, "when I descended here——"

"Descended!" Arthur burst out. "Tell that to the marines, sailors won't believe it."

"Stash it," Harold shouted, "or I'll sit on your head." Then, turning to the red man, he said politely, "Go on, please. What happened when you—er—descended here to make you imagine that you were in Siam?"

"I saw the people hadn't got pig-tails, so I knew it wasn't China. And I knew that Siam was somewhere

this way, so I thought I'd reached it. I suppose, sir, you are quite certain that this isn't Siam."

"Oh, quite."

"Then I ain't a Siamese god after all, but a—— what's the name of the people, sir?"

"Burmese."

"A Burmese god."

"Well, one is quite as good as the other. And now, will you be kind enough to inform us why it was that you—that you—er—descended here?"

"I'll do so with pleasure, sir. To begin with, my name is Ginger Venn——"

"Ginger is a nickname, I presume," Harold interrupted, with his usual desire for accuracy.

"It was, sir, but I've made it my real name now. I was christened John, but bless you, sir, no one but my mother ever called me that. At school I was always called 'Ginger,' and when I went to work it was just the same. I'd tell people that my name was John, but before they'd known me two hours, they'd be calling me 'Ginger,' flat to my face. So I said to myself, 'What's the good of having a decent name if it's never used?' and as I didn't like to be called out of it, I chucked it for good, and made 'Ginger' my proper name."

"A very good idea," Harold declared. "Please continue your story."

"Well, sir, one day as I was going home from work—I lived just off Tottenham Court Road then—I saw a real

swell attacked by two roughs. They nicked his watch and were running off with it, when I stopped one of them—the fellow that had got the watch—and held him until the gent and a policeman came up. Well, sir, the swell was a real gentleman. He thanked me, gave me a sovereign, and then asked for my name and address. A few days afterwards I had a letter from him, telling me to come and see him. I went, of course, and when he found that I'd had decent schooling, he asked me if I'd like to go with him to India. 'Yes,' I said at once; and I went as his servant. Well, sir, to cut a long story short, the gent died about two months after we got to India. His friends offered to pay my passage back to England, but I told them that I should like to get a job in Calcutta. So they gave me fifty rupees, and let me understand that they had washed their hands of me. I made that money last as long as possible, but every anna of it was gone before I'd found a job. I owed a Eurasian a few rupees for board and lodging, and was about as hard up as possible, when I suddenly had what I then thought was a stroke of luck. A fellow had arrived in Calcutta with a patent balloon, which he declared licked all others that had ever been invented, and would make ballooning a popular and not very expensive amusement. It could travel three times the pace of other balloons, and was suitable for any climate. He announced his intention of making an ascent on a certain day, if the weather was favourable, and people flocked in from all parts of the country to witness it.

When the day arrived the weather was just what the man desired, but the ascent was nearly postponed, through his assistant being laid up with fever that morning. The aeronaut, poor chap, was half out of his mind through disappointment, and that can scarcely be wondered at, for the making of his balloon had occupied his sole attention for many years. Besides that, he knew that if he made a succesful trip, he would be on the high road to fortune. Well, when I heard what a fix he was in, I said to myself, 'Here's a chance for me.' I went up to him, and offered to take the sick man's place. I told him that I'd never been up in a balloon, but that I'd accompany him if he gave me two hundred rupees, and paid my travelling expenses from wherever we alighted to Calcutta. He jumped at my offer, and then I began to get a bit nervous; but he didn't guess that, and said I was a plucky fellow. I tell you straight that I didn't feel like one. If I live to be a hundred I shall never forget those few moments just before the start. I felt just as miserable as if I were about to be hanged. Then I heard the words 'Let go' shouted, and immediately the earth seemed to sink away from us. The people cheered, and my companion waved his handkerchief gaily. I imitated him, but my heart sank as I saw everything below growing smaller and smaller. And yet the sight fascinated me like, and it was only the recollection that I was there to render the aeronaut what assistance I could that caused me to look round. To my astonishment, I saw that my companion

was leaning over the side of the car, tugging hard at a rope. Evidently something was wrong, but what I don't know even now. Well, just as I was going to ask if I could help him, he leant a little farther out and pulled still harder. The next moment a terrible thing happened; the aeronaut overbalanced himself. I grabbed at him frantically, but only managed to catch hold of his coat—a calico thing—which split from tail to collar. As it gave way, I tried to seize the poor fellow's legs. I caught hold of one, and putting all my strength into the job, made a last effort to save him. And I might have done it, too, if the fellow hadn't struggled. He tried hard to hook his other foot in the car, and, doing so, kicked me on the forehead and stunned me. How long I was insensible is more than I can say, but when I came round and remembered what had happened, well I just wished that I was dead. Then I peeped over the side of the car, hoping that after all the poor fellow was clinging to it. But he wasn't, and there was I alone in the balloon. I can tell you, gentlemen, that I felt horribly frightened. You see, I knew nothing about balloons, and the thought of being starved to death in one, and my skeleton sailing about, for years perhaps, wasn't pleasant. Once I got desperate and decided to jump out and end my troubles, but at the last moment I became sane again, and was horrified to think how near I had been to committing suicide. I vowed, there and then, that I would never take my own life, even if I knew that I was to be put to an

awful death. Well, after making up my mind about that I got a bit calmer, and began to look about to see if I could find out how the balloon was managed. I discovered several things that I hadn't noticed before, but I didn't meddle with them for fear I should make matters worse than they were. I decided not to touch them until I felt that I was dying, when it would not matter if I did make a mistake. As I came to that decision I saw something that astonished me. The balloon had changed its course, and was again crossing Calcutta. The poor aeronaut had arranged to travel inland, and the start was according to his plans. But now I was travelling in the opposite direction, and to my joy I noticed that the balloon was much nearer earth than it was a short time before. I shouted with delight, for I thought that it was descending. It wasn't though, or at least it didn't descend far. It sailed along at a tremendous pace, and now that I was getting accustomed to my position I noticed how grand the view was. Then suddenly I saw the sea, and a feeling of horror came over me when I found that I was being carried out over the ocean. I remembered, however, that drowning wasn't a bad death. Certainly it was better than dying from starvation in a balloon, and cheered up with that idea I waited calmly for the end. But the end didn't come, or else, of course, I shouldn't be here. Soon the balloon was over the sea, and, looking in every direction, I could see nothing but water. For hours there was nothing else to be seen, and I got sick of the sight of

it. Then, at last, I spied land again, and grew cheerful once more. In a very short time the balloon was passing over it, and not at a very great height. Ahead of us I noticed some high hills. We were sailing right at them, and once again I grew hopeful of reaching earth in safety. And soon the balloon descended with a rush that quite bewildered me. But it did not touch land, although it crossed within a hundred feet, I should think, of the trees on the top of the first hill. Another hill was near, and I prayed that it might alight there. Better luck than that, however, came to me, for the balloon as it passed over the valley continued to descend rapidly, and finally the car struck earth about half-way up the second hill, throwing me clean out. And on my honour, gentlemen, I wasn't hurt a bit."

"What happened to the balloon?" Arthur enquired, eagerly.

"Why, sir, directly it had chucked me out it shot up again and sailed away over the top of the hill, and I can tell you that I was jolly glad to see the last of it. But don't you think that my adventures were all over, for they weren't. When I looked about me I found that the natives were rushing in all directions towards me. I didn't like the look of them, for they were all shouting at the top of their voices, and I guessed that they were threatening me. But they weren't. Just as I was going to make friendly signs, they all fell flat on the ground with their foreheads touching the earth. I knew that they

were showing respect to me, but I'm bothered if I could guess what I had done to deserve it. But I didn't let them see that. When they had been lying flat on their faces for two or three minutes, I touched one of them and signed to him to rise. He did so, and his friends did the same. Then an old fellow—he was the head-man I have discovered since—came forward and talked a lot of gibberish to me. Of course I couldn't understand a word of his lingo, so I grinned and nodded my head. The old fellow was quite satisfied with that, and said something to his people, who gathered round me, smiling in a very friendly way. So I kept on smiling in return until my face began to ache. Well, after a time some men advanced towards me with a dooly, and, setting it down, made it clear to me by their actions that they desired me to enter it. I got in at once, and was carried without a halt into this village, where I found the people lining the roads to see me go by. But the funny thing was that they didn't see much of me after all, for, as I approached, they fell flat on the ground and hid their faces until I had passed. Some of the people, before falling down, flung flowers and fruit in front of me, so that the men carrying me trampled on them. I thought that a wretched waste of good things, especially as I was half-starving. However, I didn't have to wait much longer for a meal, as the moment I arrived at the head-man's house rice and lots of other food was given to me. I can tell you, gentlemen, that I enjoyed it thoroughly. Well, when I'd had a rattling good feed, I

began to get inquisitive like, for I couldn't understand why the Sia—the Burmese, I mean, were so jolly kind. I asked them in English, but it wasn't any good, for there wasn't a man or woman among them who could make out a word I said. And now, to cut a long story short, I must tell you that a splendid teak house, the best in the village, was given over to me, and that twice a day food was placed at my front door. For two years—that is the whole of the time I have been here—a meal has never been forgotten or even behind time. And why do you think they are all so jolly attentive? I don't suppose you'd guess, so I'll tell you. Because they think that I'm a god. They saw me come down in the balloon, and believe that I came from the heavens. The balloon—of course they had never seen one before—they imagine to be a god's carriage. It was a long time before I discovered all that, but when I did, I didn't try to undeceive them in case they might have turned nasty."

"Do they still treat you with reverence?" Harold enquired.

"Oh, yes. Whenever I go out for a stroll everybody I meet flops down on the ground and hides his face. And I can tell you that I'm sick of seeing them do it. In fact I'm tired of being a god. It's easy work, but very monotonous. Only two or three fellows are allowed to speak to me, and they're in such fear of me all the while that I don't enjoy trying to make them understand what I mean."

"Why didn't you try to escape?" Arthur asked. "I should have tried."

"You're young and hot-headed," Ginger Venn replied, "I'm older and more cautious. I could have escaped easily hundreds of times, but was stopped from doing so by the thought that I might only run into danger. I don't know anything about this country, and if I had started marching through the jungle I should probably have been killed by tigers, or some other wild beasts, before I had gone far. But if you, gentlemen, think of escaping I shall be very thankful if you'll let me accompany you."

"We shall be jolly glad to have you," Arthur declared. "Shan't we, Harold?"

"Certainly we shall," Harold answered. "And now, Mr. Venn——"

"Call me Ginger Venn, sir, please," the god interrupted. "It sounds more friendly, and puts me in mind of old days."

"Very well, then, Ginger Venn it shall be in future. Now what I was about to say is that, having heard your story, it is only fair that we should tell you how it is that we are here."

"Thank you, sir. I am anxious to hear your adventures, for I know that you must have had some to get here."

"Shall I tell the tale, Arthur, or will you?" Harold enquired.

"Oh, you tell it," Arthur replied, whereupon Harold began to relate all that had happened to them since that unfortunate hour when, in their anxiety to capture a flag of defiance, they had chased the retreating Burmese and had fallen into the pit prepared for them.

Ginger Venn was interested greatly in the story of their adventures.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, when Harold finished speaking, "you've had a lively time and no mistake, but you'll have some more adventures before you get back to your ship, I'm thinking."

"And a jolly good job too," Arthur declared. "Anything is better than loafing about as we are now."

"That's quite right. Now let us think about how we shall escape. Can you trust that fellow Bah Pay?"

"Oh yes," Harold declared, "perfectly."

"Then he'll have to be our guide and interpreter. Where is he now?"

"Somewhere in the village, talking to his countrymen."

"We are the only people in the village just now. Everybody has gone to a cock-fight that is being held about a mile away from here. Bah Pay, no doubt, is there. It was because all the people were away that I came here in answer to your letter. In future you must come to my house, for while I remain a god I must keep up my dignity. Now, gentlemen, I'll be off. It's been a grand treat to me to see your English faces, and now I only

want one thing, and that is to get back to old England. I wonder what they'll say in Tottenham Court Road when I tell them I've been a god. Won't believe me, I expect. Well, they needn't, but I am one all the same. Good-bye, gentlemen, and please don't forget to come to my house early to-morrow morning. Bah Pay will be able to find it easily."

"We will be there without fail," Harold declared, shaking hands with him.

"And we're jolly glad we've come across you," Arthur added, when he grasped the god's hand. "We'll stick to each other like wax until we're all three safe on board the grand old *Fox*."

"Gentlemen, we will," Ginger Venn declared, and departed, Arthur and Harold remaining at the door of their hut watching the sturdy, quaint-looking Englishman as he strode pompously down the centre of the bullock track. And when they saw a posse of Burmans returning from the cock-fight meet him unexpectedly, and immediately fall flat on their faces, they ran back into their huts and laughed until they got hiccoughs.

CHAPTER VI

THE VILLAGERS' PETITION

WHEN Bah Pay returned to his English friends he was in very high spirits.

"My lord," he said, addressing Harold, "I have not been idle since I left you. I have spoken with many of my countrymen, and have discovered exactly where we are. Unfortunately we are many weeks' journey from the Irrawaddy, but I believe, nevertheless, that we shall be able to reach it in safety. The people are still unaware that there is a war with the English, and that, of course, will make it possible for us to rely on the hospitality of the various villages that we come across. If you are ready to depart, we will begin our journey to-night."

"We can't, to-night," Arthur declared, and then related fully the story that Ginger Venn had told them. All Burmans enjoy a joke, and Bah Pay, who considered himself greatly superior to his countrymen, roared with laughter when told of the villagers' credulity.

"My lord," he said, "my countrymen have said many things to me to-day about that *Nat*. They do not think

your friend a god exactly, but a *Nat*, or evil spirit. They described how he descended, but it never struck me that his heavenly carriage was only a balloon. They consider that he is a very great *Nat*, and believe that their language is not good enough for him, and that is why he never speaks it. They declare that he can speak all languages, cure all diseases, and, in fact, do whatever he likes."

"If he can," Arthur remarked, "he'll be a still more valuable addition to our party than I expected. He's a sturdy fellow, Bah Pay, and if we have to do any fighting he'll be a treasure."

"My lord, I am very anxious to see him," Bah Pay declared, "and at daybreak we will go to his palace as he desired."

So, early the following morning, while the mist was still hanging over the village, Arthur, Harold, and Bah Pay started out, and, walking quickly, soon arrived at Ginger Venn's residence. Compared with other houses in the village it was a magnificent erection, having three roofs, one above the other, and each standing on poles. The best local wood-carvers had evidently spent much time on the building, for it was adorned with almost countless figures of demons with the most horrible heads that man ever imagined.

After examining some of the monstrosities, the midshipmen and their guide turned to enter the house, but their way was barred by several servants armed with blunderbusses.

Bah Pay intimated to his countrymen that the white *kalas* had come to see the *Nat*.

"It is presumption," the chief servant replied. "If the great spirit wished to see the white *kalas* he would have told them to come."

"He has told them," Bah Pay answered.

The servant looked as if he very much doubted that, but before he had made up his mind what to do, Ginger Venn appeared at the door, and immediately the servants prostrated themselves. And to the great surprise of Arthur and Harold, Bah Pay also fell and hid his face on the ground.

"Come in," Ginger Venn said cheerfully, and Arthur and Harold accepted his invitation with alacrity. Bah Pay had evidently been peeping, for, when he saw the midshipmen enter the house, he jumped up and followed them. And when the three were alone with Ginger Venn, he hastened to explain why he had prostrated himself.

"My lord, I knew that you were not a god," he said, addressing Ginger Venn, "but I did not wish my countrymen to be aware that I did not fear you as much as they do."

"Quite right," Ginger Venn declared, grasping his hand, and shaking it heartily. "You're the man that's going to help us escape, aren't you?"

"My lord, I am."

"Drop that. Don't 'my lord' me. I'm not a swell like these young gentlemen here, and don't want to pretend to

be, so when you want to call me anything, call me Ginger Venn."

"My lord, I will."

"Why didn't you then? Say 'Ginger Venn, I will,' just to get your tongue in training."

"Ginger Venn, I will," Bah Pay repeated, smilingly.

"That's right. Now let's start talking business at once. As you know, these two young gentlemen and I want to get back to our countrymen. Can you lead us to them?"

"My——Ginger Venn, I can. I can lead you to the Irrawaddy, and then we can go down to Rangoon by boat."

"Are those the places we want to get to?" Ginger Venn asked, turning to Arthur and Harold, for he knew absolutely nothing of the names of the rivers and cities of Burma.

"Yes," Harold answered, "Rangoon is our destination, and when we get there I hope we shall find that it is a British possession."

"And so do I," Bah Pay declared.

"That's not very patriotic," Arthur remarked.

"My lord, I say that because I love my country. It is the King and his officers of state that I detest. They are fiends, and my countrymen will never be happy while they rule the land. If the English lords will take the land and rule it, my countrymen will be happy."

"That may be quite true," Ginger Venn answered,

“but I must say that the people here always struck me as being very happy.”

“Ginger Venn, they are, but that is because this is an unimportant place, and its people have no wealth. The King’s servants do not think that they could get anything if they came here. But, if the war continues, men will be wanted, and then the King’s servants will come to collect them, and will cheat and rob and murder men and women who have done them no harm. They will come before long, but not until we are gone. My lords, shall we start to-morrow morning at daybreak?”

The three Englishmen nodded assent, and thereupon set to work and made all the preliminary arrangements for the flight. They were settled quickly, and then the visitors departed, for fear that a prolonged stay might arouse suspicion.

Arthur and Harold were very much excited at the prospect of reaching their old ship in the course of a month or two, and could talk of nothing else.

Unfortunately, the Englishmen’s plans were not carried out, for, some hours after returning from seeing Ginger Venn, both Arthur and Harold fell ill with dysentery. It is remarkable that they were not laid up long before with one or other of the many illnesses which are common to unacclimated Europeans who venture into the jungles of Burma. But Arthur and Harold were blessed with good constitutions, and that, coupled with the active life they had led since the capture of the great Pagoda at Rangoon,

was the reason that they had resisted for so long the fell diseases lurking around them.

Bah Pay saw at once that all thoughts of escape from the village would have to be put aside for many days. When he insisted that delay was necessary Arthur and Harold were bitterly disappointed, but recognised that what he said was true. Day by day they grew weaker, and, in spite of the devotion of Ginger Venn and Bah Pay, it seemed, at one time, as if the young midshipmen would never see again their beloved ship. But at last, when both lads were reduced to such weakness that the desire to live had passed away, and resignation to the will of God had taken its place, a change was noticed in their condition.

"They'll recover," Ginger Venn whispered, with tears of joy in his eyes.

And, for reply, Bah Pay nodded and smiled. There were tears in his eyes also, and he did not trust himself to speak, for there was a lump in his throat which would have made his speech falter.

Fortunately these two good friends of the English lads were right in their surmise, but still the invalids' recovery was slow work. For many days they subsisted almost entirely on milk and rice, specially cooked by Bah Pay. Then, when at last they became so tired of that diet that they vowed they never wanted to taste either milk or rice again, they were given some chicken and chicken broth. Many of the young fowls who shared the house with them, and the goat were committed to the cooking-pot during

the next few days, with excellent results. Arthur and Harold now improved rapidly, and the old desire to get back to the *Fox* as quickly as possible returned with increased vigour.

"Let us make a start to-morrow," they would say frequently, but Ginger Venn and Bah Pay would not hear of it.

"When you have quite recovered, and tried your strength by walking about the village for some days, we will start. Not before."

It was Ginger Venn who said that, and he intended fully to make his young countrymen abide by his decision, which he was confident was for their own good. But the unforeseen happened and upset his plans. One morning, as he quitted the midshipmen's house, he found that the whole village had assembled in front of it. When he appeared, every man, woman, and child behaved in the usual abject fashion, but the head-man, who lay a few yards in the front of the others, held aloft in one hand a petition engraved on a palm-leaf. It was very evident to Ginger Venn that something of unusual importance was about to occur, so he called to Bah Pay to come out and explain to him what the people required.

Bah Pay came at once, and, seeing the petition held aloft, desired the head-man to advance and present it to the Great Red *Nat*. But the head-man found that advancing on all-fours was not a particularly easy matter when it was necessary to keep the petition well above his own head.



The head-man held aloft a petition.

He moved on his knees and elbows, keeping his head well down below the level of his uplifted hand, and arrived, after a wearisome journey, at Ginger Venn's feet. Ginger Venn took the petition, and passed it on to Bah Pay to translate.

Bah Pay glanced at it, and then said to his countrymen in a loud voice: "The Great Red *Nat* will deign to answer your petition to-night at sunset."

A murmur of satisfaction broke from the assembled people, who still remained prostrate.

"The Great Red *Nat*," Bah Pay declared, "commands you to arise and return to your houses."

Immediately the people arose and hurried away, half fearing that, in spite of the *Nat's* command, some terrible calamity would fall upon them for daring to stand in his presence.

When the last of the petitioners had scuttled away, Bah Pay said to Ginger Venn, "Let us go inside. This is a very important petition, and the young English lords must hear it read."

As it happened, Arthur had been peeping out of the hut to see where Bah Pay had gone, and had witnessed, with much amusement, the presentation of the petition. Then, getting back to bed, he related to his friend what he had seen. Both were most anxious to know what the petition was about, and, fortunately, Bay Pay did not keep them long in suspense.

"These are the words that are contained in the

petition," he said, and began forthwith to read aloud—

“TO THE GREAT RED *NAT*.

“O mighty *Nat*, have mercy on us. Many hundreds of days have passed since you came from the heavens, in your flying carriage, to dwell among us. It was a great honour, O mighty *Nat*, that you did unto us when you came to our humble village. We rejoiced, and, day by day, did all that we could to win your approval and protection. We built you a house such as no other *Nat* ever had, and placed daily at your door the best food that our women could prepare. Moreover, we gave you the finest red *lungyi* that could be bought from the traders who come from Rangoon. And in action, speech, and thought we treated you with reverence. Mighty *Nat*, it is known to you that all these things are true. We have done our best, and yet you are displeased. Our hearts are sad, for we know not how we have offended you. All we know is that we have felt your displeasure day by day. You gave Bah Toon, the son of our head-man, a pine-apple, and two days later the boy fell into the river and was seized by a crocodile. Then, mighty *Nat*, there was Mah Thin's cow; you patted it, and, three weeks after, it died. Many other signs of your displeasure we have received, and the last is worst of all. The two white *kalas* came to our village, and we treated them as we should wish to be treated if we were travelling in a distant land. We gave them the best

of all that we had, and they were happy. And then, mighty *Nat*, you deigned to speak to them and to permit them to speak to you. Therefore they are ill, and have become dying men. They will die in our village, and our enemies will say that we have ill-treated them. Mighty *Nat*, we have but spoken the truth. Spare us, have mercy on us, and return to your home in the heavens. Call your flying carriage, mighty *Nat*, and let it bear you away."

"That's all," Bah Pay declared, surveying the Englishmen.

"And quite enough too," Ginger Venn declared, scratching his head in perplexity. "How am I to get the wretched balloon back?"

"You have but to say the word, Mighty *Nat*," Arthur answered, with mock seriousness, "and it will descend from the heavens."

"Then I hope that he won't say the word," Harold declared, laughingly, "for I don't want him to part company with us."

"Don't you fear that, sir," Ginger Venn said, emphatically. "I've had quite enough of balloons, and wouldn't go up in another to save my life. I'll stick to you young gentlemen until we get to that ship of yours that you're always talking about. But, at the same time, I'm sorry that the people have got savage with me. I should have liked to have them say to each other, long after I was

back in London, 'That old red god of ours was a fine old chap.' Instead of that, they'll tell all manner of lies about me to their children. They'll say that I killed the head-man's son, that I killed an old woman's cow, and tried to kill two young Englishmen."

"At any rate," Harold remarked, "we shall know that you didn't."

"But you ain't the Burmese, sir. It's my reputation I'm thinking of. I don't want my character taken away."

"Then you'd better stop here and look after it," Bah Pay suggested.

"Thank you for nothing," Ginger Venn answered sharply. "Burma isn't bad, but England's a thousand times better. That's a fact, Mr. Bah Pay, and if ever you have the jolly good fortune to go to London you'll say so yourself."

Bah Pay looked as if he very much doubted that he would ever say anything of the kind, but, being of a peaceful disposition and not particularly fond of controversy, he smoothed over the matter by reminding Ginger Venn that he was pledged to give a reply to the petition at sunset.

"What can I say?" Ginger Venn asked, turning to Arthur and Harold in his perplexity.

"Tell them," Harold suggested, "that you have decided to depart from them according to their request."

"By balloon?" Arthur enquired.

"The balloon had better not be mentioned at all. Ginger Venn will declare that he has agreed to depart, and if the people imagine that he is going to sail off in his heavenly carriage that is not our fault. But he must not fix any particular day for his departure, for we do not know what might turn up to hinder our flight. I suggest that he promise to depart as quickly as possible. That will not bind him to any day, and give us an opportunity to escape."

Arthur, Ginger Venn, and Bah Pay agreeing with that suggestion, they started out at sunset to make the *Nat's* reply known to the people, who had already assembled in full force.

"Fellow-Burmans," Bah Pay exclaimed, in a loud voice, "the Great Red *Nat* has deigned to read your petition, and is not angry with what you have said. He will depart; but it is many days' journey that he has to go, and preparations must be made."

The head-man, raising his face from the ground, murmured that of course preparation for a long journey took time.

"The Great Red *Nat*," Bah Pay continued, "will have mercy on you, and will not punish you for daring to say that all that he did was not good."

This excellent piece of news was received with delight by the prostrate crowd, for they had quite expected that some punishment would be meted out to them for their audacity. In less than a minute the Great Red *Nat* was

as revered and popular as ever he had been, and those who had at first objected to the petition being sent now reviled, in whispers, those who had been responsible for its drawing up.

"If the Great Red *Nat* leaves us," one man declared, "another will be sent to take his place, for, as we all know, the village is never without a Great *Nat*. But the *Nat* who takes the place of the Great Red *Nat* will be invisible and do us more harm. Truly the Great Red *Nat* did not harm many of us. If he had not harmed the head-man's son, who would have asked him to depart? We have behaved foolishly, but it is not yet too late. I will ask the Great Red *Nat* to remain among us."

Running quickly on his hands and knees, the man who had just spoken reached the feet of Ginger Venn and his friends, and exclaimed passionately—

"Oh, Mighty Red *Nat*, forgive us, and stay with us. Do not depart——"

"Silence," Bah Pay shouted. "The Great Red *Nat* will depart. He has already ordered his heavenly carriage to descend. Depart, for the Great Red *Nat* will be enraged if you speak to him again."

"That settles them," Bah Pay said to the Englishmen, as the crowd crawled out of sight, and then explained to them what had happened. They laughed heartily over the whole business, and were still more amused when, later in the day, they heard that a number of men had been instructed to watch the heavens and give warning

of the approach of the *Nat's* carriage. Evidently the Burmese were looking forward to enjoying a novel sight, and their anxiety not to miss it made the Englishmen and Bah Pay fear that they would experience great difficulty in escaping unseen from the village.

CHAPTER VII

LOST IN THE JUNGLE

FOR two days and two nights the Burmese sat watching for the arrival of the Great Red *Nat's* heavenly carriage, and so anxious were they that it should not escape their observation that they formed a ring round Ginger Venn's house, so that he could not quit it without their seeing him. This precaution was taken because some one had suggested that, in all probability, the Great Red *Nat's* heavenly carriage would descend in the same spot as on the previous occasion.

This very close watch on Ginger Venn was more than he and his friends expected, and, consequently, they all began to wonder how they were going to get clear away. At last, to see what would happen, Ginger Venn, Arthur, Harold, Bah Pay, and the dog went for a stroll. The whole of the villagers immediately followed them at a respectful distance, convinced that the Great Red *Nat* was now about to make his ascent. And very disappointed they were when, after about half-an-hour's walk, Ginger Venn and his friends returned to the house.

"What's going to happen now?" Arthur enquired, when they were comfortable on their mats, but no one answered, for the very good reason that no one knew.

"Can't you terrify them into going away, Mighty *Nat*?" Arthur continued. "Tell them that your heavenly carriage is very bashful, and won't descend if it sees a lot of people looking out for it."

"They'd answer," Harold remarked, "that it wasn't bashful when it came down before."

"Well, make up a better tale yourself," Arthur retorted, "only don't be too long-winded over it."

"I think," Harold declared, pulling Arthur's ear as he spoke, "that Ginger Venn will never escape from here unless he is disguised."

"Perhaps you will tell us," Arthur said, "how he can be disguised. Ginger Venn is a very decent fellow, but you can't deny that his appearance is rather uncommon."

"My opinion," Ginger Venn joined in, "is that I look a jolly old guy."

"And so you do," Arthur agreed, cordially. "Therefore, I want to hear how Harold intends to disguise you."

"I'll satisfy you at once," Harold answered. "I propose cutting off Ginger Venn's Charles the First locks, reducing his beard to a respectable length, and placing on his face, to tone down his colour, some of that powder which the Burmese ladies use in making their toilet."

"It's not a bad idea," Arthur declared, patronisingly. "What is your opinion, Ginger Venn?"

"Well, gentlemen," Ginger Venn answered, "of course I'll let you do anything you like, for I ain't such an idiot as to fancy myself handsome, but I'm thinking that if the people were to see me cropped and smartened up they'd know I was an Englishman, and there'd be as big a row as ever I saw in my life."

"But we shall take jolly good care that you are not seen," Harold assured him.

"Very well then. Cut away as quickly as you like."

"Where are the scissors?" Arthur enquired. "I suppose you're not so jolly green as to let us cut it with a knife. Bah Pay, can't you get us some scissors?"

"My lord, I will try to get them," Bah Pay answered, and departed, appearing again in a few minutes with three pairs of scissors.

"Didn't the people ask you why you wanted them?" Harold said, testing them with the critical air of a professional barber.

"They said," Bah Pay answered, "'The white *kalas* are going to cut themselves new clothes,' and wanted to come and help. Then I told them that they did not know how to make foolish clothes such as white *kalas* wear, and that it was not worth their while to learn."

"Bah Pay, you're a genius," Arthur declared, and Bah Pay smiled serenely, as if he knew that he was not being over-praised. Most Burmans are very conceited, and Bah Pay had his full share of the national weakness. Arthur, observing that, was strongly inclined to add, "and a jolly

conceited one, too," but resisted the desire and said instead, "Now let's start work. Are you ready, Ginger Venn?"

"Ready and waiting, sir," Ginger Venn answered.

"You'd better take your coat off," Harold suggested, "for there'll be plenty of hair to fall on to you."

"So there will be, sir," and the Great Red *Nat* immediately stripped himself of his Burmese coat and vest. "And when you've done with me," he continued, "I'll just have a bath. Which young gentleman is going to be the barber?"

"We'll both be barbers," Harold replied. "There's a lot to be done, and we can't afford to waste time. I'll cut your hair, and Arthur will cut your beard. Ready, Arthur?"

"Aye, aye," Arthur answered.

"Then fire away."

Immediately the two midshipmen fell to work in earnest, clipping off big lumps of red hair with a zest that quite delighted Bah Pay. But when they had been at work about a minute, Arthur sang out, "Look here, Harold, I've got the worst of this job. All the hair that you cut off falls on to my arms. I'm in a beastly mess already."

"Let us change places then," Harold suggested, good-humouredly, and, Arthur agreeing, turned his attention to Ginger Venn's beard, while Arthur started work on his head with a fresh burst of energy. For the first minute or so his chief anxiety was to make as much hair as

possible fall upon Harold, but finding that his shipmate took no notice of his efforts in that direction, he exclaimed, scornfully, "Well, you have made a muddle of this head. You've spoilt the job entirely. I wish that I had done the whole of it myself."

"I wish that you had," Harold retorted, "for I don't want to share the disgrace of having mutilated this beard. Ginger Venn must have been in agony while you were cutting it."

"You say that just because you know you ran the point of the scissors into his head, and want to convince yourself that I am as clumsy as you. But I'm not. Ginger Venn, which of us has hurt you most?"

"Can't say, sir," Ginger Venn declared, gruffly, "but I know that between the two of you I've had more pain in the last two minutes than I've ever had since I've been in this here land. You may be good sailors, young gentlemen, but you're beastly bad barbers. You'd be all right at grass-cutting, no doubt, but, you see, a man's head can feel, and that's what a grass plot can't. Well, well, I'm not complaining. You're doing your best, I'm certain; but it's awful bad."

After that unflattering expression of opinion Arthur and Harold proceeded more cautiously, but had made little progress when Bah Pay, who had been peeping out of the house, exclaimed excitedly—

"My lords, now is the time to escape. There is no one watching us."

That statement of the trusty Burman brought the amateur barbers' task to an abrupt conclusion, for when the long-suffering Ginger Venn heard it, he sprang from his chair, upsetting the midshipmen, and reached Bah Pay's place of observation. Arthur and Harold found other places from which to peep.

"There's not a man, woman, or child to be seen anywhere," Arthur declared, after a glance out. "Let's ske-daddle at once."

"They may be watching from some place of concealment," Harold suggested, but the cautious idea was not entertained by any of his companions.

"But what can be their reason for so abruptly giving up watching us?" Harold enquired, by no means convinced that his suggestion was not a good one.

"That's their reason, sir," Ginger Venn replied, pointing to a thick cloud of smoke rising at the other end of the village, and, as he spoke, flames and sparks leapt up and showed that a big fire was raging.

"They have all gone to see it," Ginger Venn continued, hurriedly. "It's a sight these people enjoy thoroughly. They'll leave anything to run off to a fire. But you mustn't think they go to help put it out, because they don't; they all squat down at a safe distance from the flames, and smoke cheroots and shout with delight as the fire makes headway. Even the people whose houses are burning don't try to extinguish the flames, but sit down among the crowd to enjoy the sight."

"But what is the reason of such strange conduct?" Harold enquired.

"It's no good asking me, sir," Ginger Venn answered. "You'd better ask Bah Pay."

"My lord, there are several reasons," Bah Pay declared, without waiting to be appealed to. "The chief one is that wood is so plentiful that it is easier and safer to build a new hut than to save from destruction one that is on fire. Another reason is that my countrymen believe that when a man's house catches fire it is a punishment for some sin he has committed, and, therefore, it is presumptuous to try to combat the flames. But we must not waste time in talking. We must act quickly."

And, as he concluded his speech, the Burman swept into a cloth all the food that the house contained and made a bundle of it. Then he gathered up Ginger Venn's shorn locks and stuffed them in his pocket.

"Now, my lords," he continued, "we will start. I will walk ahead, so that if I see any one, I will warn you to hide until he has gone."

Bah Pay now crept out at the back of the house, and, having proceeded a short distance, beckoned to the Englishmen to follow him. They did so, quietly and quickly, each man grasping firmly in his hand a *dah*, which the Burman had purchased, some days previously, in preparation for their flight. Fortunately there was no need for them to use them that day, for, so taken up with the fire were the villagers, that neither man, woman, nor child was

met in the few hundred yards of clearing that lay between Ginger Venn's house and the jungle.

"Now we're safe," Bah Pay declared, joyfully, as they reached the jungle, "for by the time that my countrymen return from the fire, and discover that we have gone, we shall be some miles away."

"But they'll be after us like a shot, won't they?" Arthur remarked, as they hurried on in single file.

"My lord, they will not follow us," Bah Pay declared, confidently. "My countrymen are foolish people, and, when they find that we have left them, they will believe that Ginger Venn's heavenly carriage came for him, and that we all ascended in it."

"I hope you're right," Ginger Venn exclaimed, earnestly, "for I should like the people to talk kindly about me in years to come. I shouldn't care for them to discover that I was a miserable fraud, although it wasn't my fault that I was one, was it?"

As Ginger Venn finished speaking he looked round at Arthur and Harold, and the two midshipmen, quite forgetting that any noise might betray them, burst into a hearty roar of laughter.

Ginger Venn smiled good-naturedly, wondering what was the cause of the mirth, but guessed that it was he, when Bah Pay, turning round, looked at him in surprise, and then added his hearty laugh to the general merriment.

"What's the joke?" Ginger Venn enquired, grinning in anticipation of hearing something funny.

"You are, my dear fellow," Arthur answered. "Just put your hand up to your hair and beard."

Ginger Venn did so, and discovered at once that the amateur barbers, having been interrupted in the middle of their work, had left his head in an extraordinary condition. The hair on the right half of his head was cropped short, while on the left it was untouched by scissors, and hung as usual on to his shoulder. That was Harold's work, and Arthur had done his on the same principle. He had cut quite short the left half of the beard, but the right half was as long as ever it had been.

"Well, young gentlemen," Ginger Venn said, grasping his long hair with one hand and his beard with the other, "I fancy you've made me look a bit of a curiosity. I never was a handsome man, but I think you've just spoilt what good looks I had. But never mind, you shall hack the rest of the hair off when we have half-an-hour to spare."

"Oh, I'm sorry," Arthur exclaimed, "I left my scissors at your house."

"And so did I," Harold confessed, in a tone of regret.

"Well, well, it doesn't matter," Ginger Venn assured them, cheerfully. "But don't let any more Burmese fellows get hold of me while I'm like this. The last lot thought I was a god, or, as Bah Pay says, a *Nat*; the next lot will think I'm a lop-eared rabbit."

"My——Ginger Venn," Bah Pay answered, "I hope that we shall reach the Irrawaddy without any of my country-

men seeing you. But we must not laugh so loudly as we did just now, for fear any one hiding in the jungle might discover us. You wish it to be thought that you have ascended in your balloon, but if one of the villagers should see us now he would declare to all his neighbours the manner in which the Great Red *Nat* left them, and then they would start in pursuit of us."

"Then mum's the word," Arthur declared, cheerfully, as if keeping silent were a thing that he enjoyed immensely; but they had not trudged many hundred yards before he forgot Bah Pay's caution, and began questioning the Burman as to their plans.

"Oh, do shut up!" Harold interrupted, sharply. "If you don't cease chattering, I'll bind Bah Pay's turban over your mouth."

"I'd like to see you try to do it," Arthur answered, being in the humour for a struggle, but, finding that Harold was really annoyed at his talking, he became silent once more, and did not utter another word until they arrived at the top of a hill, where they sat down to eat some of the provisions which they had brought with them.

"My lords, we may talk now," Bah Pay said, and Arthur, although his mouth was full of food, at once availed himself of the permission.

"What I want to know," he declared, "is where are we rushing to, and what are we going to do when we get there? Are we getting any nearer to the *Fox*? Do you know where the next village is?"

"My lord, you ask many questions," Bah Pay answered, calmly, "but if I reply to your last one you will be satisfied, I think. I do know where the next village is. It is in that valley before us, and in two hours' time we shall reach it."

"Hurrah! That's a good piece of news, for I'm getting sick of the jungle."

"Then, my lord, you will have to be sick, for you and your honourable countrymen must not enter the village over there."

"Why not?" Arthur asked, in a tone of surprise.

"My lord, if you enter it my countrymen will not let you depart quickly. They will want you to be their guests, just as the head-man of the village we have escaped from did. So I will walk into the next village and let no man know that I have any white friends in hiding. Then, when I have discovered our nearest way to the great river, I will return to you."

"That is an excellent arrangement," Harold declared, and Ginger Venn agreed with him.

So, when, about two hours later, the travellers arrived within a quarter of a mile of the village, Bah Pay, who had been keeping a sharp look-out for a suitable camping-ground, exclaimed—

"My lords, this is an excellent spot for you to remain in until I return. I will not be any longer than I can help. I will be back in an hour at the latest."

With that he departed, but his prophecy as to the

length of his absence was not fulfilled. Four hours passed, night came on, and still he did not return.

At last the Englishmen became fearful that he had met with some serious accident, and Arthur, with his usual impetuosity, was strongly in favour of their marching boldly into the village to discover what had become of their trusty guide and friend. But Harold was averse to anything of the kind.

"If we leave this spot," he said, "we shall, in all probability, miss Bah Pay, as it is very likely that he'll return by a different way from which he went. He told us to remain here, and, if he is alive and free, you may be sure that he'll come back to us as quickly as possible. At the very least we must wait here until daybreak."

Neither Arthur nor Ginger Venn raised any objection to that decision, although they, and Harold as well, hoped fervently that Bah Pay would return long before the break of day. They spoke but little to each other, and then only in whispers, for fear that some belated villager might hear them, and carry the news of their presence to the head-man. No one thought of sleeping, for to each it was the most trying night he had spent in Burma. The great mysterious jungle which surrounded them, still as death though it appeared, was, they knew, full of life, and the expectation that some fierce animal would spring suddenly upon them from out of the gloom kept them on the alert. With *dahs* gripped tightly, and eyes aching from prolonged peering into darkness, the three Englishmen

lay hour after hour, anxious but determined. If it had been an attack of Burmans that they were awaiting, they would have been in a far happier mood, for Arthur and Harold were, as we know, accustomed to the perils of war, and Ginger Venn had determined to prove, if possible, that he could fight, although he had never had the honour of wearing Her Majesty's uniform. A human enemy they did not fear, even if he came in overwhelming numbers, but the prospect of an attack from some denizen of the jungle whom they had never seen in a wild state, was one that was far from pleasant. So, silent and watchful, they waited, and many a time some bird or beast, startled by an unknown cause, broke the awesome silence with its flight, and convinced the Englishmen that the attack was coming. But the next minute all would be silent once more.

Six long, weary hours the Englishmen had waited, when the dog Prince, who had been lying for some considerable time at their feet, pricked up his ears and growled fiercely.

"Lie down," Ginger Venn commanded quietly, and grasped his muzzle to prevent his barking.

"That's the first time he has growled," Arthur whispered. "Something is approaching, evidently."

But although they strained their ears they could hear nothing.

"A false alarm," Arthur declared, in an undertone; but Ginger Venn shook his head.

"We can't hear anything," he said, "but it's clear that he can. Just look at him."

And certainly Prince was unusually excited, making desperate efforts to bark in spite of Ginger Venn's grip on his muzzle.

"Shall I let him bark?" Ginger Venn asked, conscience-smitten at checking the natural desires of the faithful friend who had been his sole comfort during many weary months.

"No, certainly not," Harold answered, firmly. "His bark would make our whereabouts known to any man or beast prowling around."

So again they listened, and this time they heard the unmistakable noise of something pushing its way through the undergrowth.

"It's coming this way," Harold said calmly, although his heart was beating wildly with excitement, "and quickly too. Are you ready, Arthur?"

"Quite," Arthur answered.

"And you, Ginger Venn?"

"Ready and waiting, sir. Lie down, Prince."

But Prince, for once in a way, would not obey his master, and succeeded, by a sudden and unexpected start backwards, in freeing himself. The next moment he rushed into the jungle, barking loudly.

"I'm not going to lose him," Ginger Venn declared, and darted after his dog, ignoring Harold's stern command to come back.

"I'm not going to let old funny-face get hurt," Arthur exclaimed, and followed quickly in Ginger Venn's footsteps.

"Nor I, either," Harold answered, and joined in the pursuit.

Prince was now barking loudly, and making for the spot where he was, the three Englishmen, arriving in single file, found that the cause of their alarm was Bah Pay. Prince, evidently delighted at his return, was making frantic jumps into the air in front of him.

"My lords," Bah Pay said, quietly, as soon as Ginger Venn had silenced Prince, "I am sorry that I have been so long away, but I could not return before. My lords, I have bad news, very bad news."

"Anything happened to the *Fox*?" Arthur asked, excitedly.

"No, my lord. Your honourable countrymen are getting more powerful every day. I am told that they have won many battles since you were captured."

"Hurrah! What a beastly shame that we're out of all the fighting now."

"My lord, you are not out of it yet. My countrymen, in the village that I have but now returned from visiting, have only just heard that the Shway Dagon Pagoda has been captured by the English. My lord, they are wild with rage, and declare that they will drive their enemies into the sea. They will find it a hard thing to do, but I did not tell them so. Some have already started to join the

King of Burma's army, but more have remained behind to hunt for you."

"For us," Harold said. "To kill us, do you mean?"

"No, my lord, but to make you slaves."

"Oh, I thought that we'd heard the last of that matter," exclaimed Arthur, in disgust.

Bah Pay shook his head gravely.

"My countrymen are very excited, and most eager to obey the Queen's command to make you prisoners. But I have heard their plans, and perhaps, after all, we shall be able to escape. At present they have no idea that you are near at hand, but believe that you are on the way to the river. Nevertheless, they are sending out parties of searchers in all directions."

"Do you know how far we have been tracked?" Harold enquired.

"To the last village, my lord," Bah Pay declared. "They say that, when the Great Red *Nat* ascended to the heavens in his flying carriage, you were so frightened that you quitted the village at once."

"Do they still think I'm a god then?" Ginger Venn asked, eagerly.

"They're more convinced than ever. Two men declare that they saw your heavenly carriage ascending, and you looking out of it. I think that they had been drinking 'toddy,' but every one else believes the words that they say."

"I'm glad of that," Ginger Venn said simply. "The

people were very good to me, and I shouldn't like them to discover that I was a fraud."

"Then we must not permit ourselves to be captured," Bah Pay answered. "Already we have wasted too much time in talking, therefore let us push forward at once. At daybreak a number of armed men will proceed in the direction we are travelling."

"Can't we go in some other direction?" Arthur enquired.

"My lord, if we did we should only run the risk of meeting other armed parties. The best thing that we can do is to continue to hurry north, and thus keep ahead of the men who will soon be travelling in this direction. In time we shall meet the Chinese travellers taking their goods to Ava to sell. We will go with them, and leave them near the city. Then we will make our way to the great Irrawaddy."

"Yes," Harold said, "that is certainly the best thing we can do. So lead on, Bah Pay, although how you are going to find your way through this sea of tangled undergrowth is more than I can guess."

As a matter of fact it was soon evident that the estimable Burman could not find his way, for although the little band of travellers never halted, they were forced continually to turn out of their northward course by the impassable nature of the jungle plants. So many turns were they compelled to make, that, after a time, even Bah Pay grew anxious, and finally admitted that he had lost his way.

"My lords," he said excitedly, "the track must be near at hand, for I left it only a few hundred yards before the dog Prince discovered me. Let us now go in this direction."

As he spoke he started off again, in the reverse way from which they had just come. For a time travelling was comparatively easy, and the spirits of the four men rose rapidly, only, however, to be damped again by coming to another stretch of apparently impassable jungle. So far as they could see, further progress was impossible.

"We're as badly off as ever," Arthur growled.

"There's no need to tell us that," Harold answered sharply. "What we want to know is how to get out of the fix. Hallo! look there."

He pointed to the right of them, and, looking in that direction, they saw the branches of a fine leafy bush fall together with a start, quiver for a moment, and then rest.

"Did you see him?" Harold enquired, eagerly. "He was glaring at us very unpleasantly when I spotted him."

"Let's follow him then," Arthur answered, as soon as he understood that some one was spying on them, "for where he can go we surely can follow."

Then, in his impetuous way, Arthur plunged forward to the exact spot where the man had been seen, and after a fierce struggle, during which his already dilapidated uniform was reduced to a state suitable for a scarecrow, got through.

"Come along," he shouted back. "It's not so thick

when you're through that bit ; " and then rushed after the man, whose direction of flight was made known by the breaking of branches which impeded him.

Harold, Ginger Venn, and Bah Pay did not hesitate for a moment, and, pushing their way through the undergrowth, were soon close after Arthur.

" There he goes," Bah Pay exclaimed, pointing straight ahead. " Oh, my lords, it is a *phoongyee*. It is contrary to the laws of the monastery for a *phoongyee* to be out after sunset, therefore that man must be a very wicked fellow. My lords, he must not escape."

Arthur had now got his second wind, and struggling forward, utterly regardless of torn clothes and lacerated hands and face, gained quickly upon the fugitive priest, who, every now and then, looked back as he ran and hissed " Dog ! " at his daring young pursuer. As he spoke in Burmese, Arthur did not understand what his remark meant, but, guessing that it was something uncomplimentary, he vowed to pay him out for it. Of course the *phoongyee* was handicapped considerably by having to find the passable places, his pursuer not troubling to do anything but follow in his footsteps. Consequently, Arthur gained on him rapidly. Twenty yards or so, only, separated them, when the *phoongyee's* flight was stopped by the density of the jungle. Like a rat in an unfamiliar room he ran wildly up and down searching for an outlet, shouting in mingled rage and fear. Then he glanced round, and seeing that a moment's hesitation meant capture, and

possibly death, he plunged into the bushes, battling frantically to fight his way through. With a shout of triumph Arthur sprang forward, and, stretching out his arm, seized the *phoongyee's* yellow robe. With a screech the holy robe came apart in Arthur's hand, and the priest, maddened at the indignity done him, dashed aside the branches and got away. Then Arthur had a piece of very bad luck. One of the branches, pushed aside by the *phoongyee*, sprang back and cut the midshipman smartly across the face. He had been served in that manner several times during his exciting chase, but, on this occasion, a leaf struck him on the ball of the right eye and caused him excruciating pain. For a few moments he stopped short, and the fugitive took such advantage of his unexpected piece of good fortune that when Arthur, still in pain, took up the pursuit, he was disheartened to see the amount of ground that he had lost. Nevertheless, his spirits soon revived in the excitement of the chase, and once more he gained on the priest. The jungle was now less dense, and the pace of pursued and pursuer increased considerably, Arthur gaining on the *phoongyee*, however, with every stride. Soon they reached a beaten track, and down this the priest sprinted. It was his last effort, and not a very successful one, for he was plump, and the burden of his flesh was a heavy one. For about thirty yards his pace was very creditable for a man of his condition, but after that it fell off considerably and degenerated into a puffing trot.

Arthur saw that he was dead beat, and, feeling pretty fresh himself, he increased his speed, and, catching him up, sprang on the *phoongyee's* oily back. Now Arthur was a good weight for his size, and the force with which he sprang on to the *phoongyee* was more than the poor exhausted fellow could bear. He tottered forward a step or two and then fell flat on his face, Arthur, of course, going down with him. Whether, or not, the *phoongyee* was hurt, it is impossible to say, but he started shouting at the top of his voice.

"Shut up," Arthur commanded, "I'm not going to hurt you," but, as the *phoongyee* did not understand a word of English, Arthur's speech was not at all consoling. Evidently he took it for a threat, as he increased his yells—one moment uttering a cry like a jackal's, the next shouting wild appeals for help.

"Well, if you won't shut up," Arthur said at last, "I'll have to make you," and proceeded to try and stuff his own handkerchief—which was as black as a sweep's—into the *phoongyee's* mouth. But he did not succeed in his intention, for the holy man had very good teeth, and used them so vigorously that Arthur's hand bled in many places. That of course only made him more determined to succeed in gagging the fellow, and he had just rolled him on to his back, to get a better view of his mouth, when Bah Pay came rushing up in a most excited manner.

"My lord," he said, "let the *phoongyee* go. We are now



He had just rolled him on to his back to get a better view of his mouth,
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on the path that we were looking for, and must hurry on at once."

"But, if I let him go, he will set his people on our track," Arthur protested.

"They have already decided to search for us. All he can do is to make them begin their search a little sooner. Release him, my lord, and hurry back with me to your honourable friends."

Somewhat unwillingly, Arthur did as desired, and as the *phoongyee* scrambled to his feet, Bah Pay said to him in Burmese—

"Virtuous lord, we do not wish to harm you, or even to detain you. Depart at once, if it is pleasing to you to do so."

The *phoongyee* had evidently expected a very different ending to his adventure, and could not realise that what he had heard was true, but, when Bah Pay repeated that he was at liberty to depart, he jumped up from the ground and ran off towards the village without uttering a word of thanks or abuse.

"It seems to me," Arthur said, when he and Bah Pay joined Harold and Ginger Venn, "that my bunking after that *phoongyee* was a waste of energy."

"Not at all, Arthur," Harold declared. "If you hadn't kept that fellow in sight we should still be looking for this path. Now that we are back in it again we must step out and make up for lost time."

So, alternately running and walking, they pushed on quickly, and, before the sun was high in the heavens, reached a high and well-wooded hill.

“This is a stiff bit, and no mistake,” Harold said, as they began the ascent, “so we’ll tackle it quietly.”

CHAPTER VIII

THE FALLING FOREST

HAROLD did not exaggerate when he said that the hill was a "stiff bit." At any time it would have winded them to climb it, but now, footsore, and wearied from want of sleep and food, they found it the hardest task they had encountered during their wanderings in Burma. But they stuck to it manfully, and, about mid-day, reached the summit, where they found, to their great joy, a rest-house, and, standing in a shady corner, two jars full of pure water.

"God bless the good people who placed them here," Harold said, reverently, and Ginger Venn added an earnest "Amen."

Arthur was already drinking, and when the others had quenched their thirst he had not finished.

"Stop that," Harold exclaimed, authoritatively, as Arthur dipped the horn mug once again into the water. "If you drink any more you'll be laid up again."

Somewhat reluctantly, Arthur poured back the water and turned away from the jars.

"What's the next thing on the programme?" he enquired, flinging himself down on the ground.

"Sleep," Harold answered, "but not in the rest-house. Bah Pay alone must sleep there, so that if any of his countrymen come along their suspicions will not be aroused. Possibly they will remain to talk with him, and then he will be able to discover the latest news, and, perhaps, some way of our getting to the Irrawaddy. We three must sleep near at hand in the bushes."

"My lord, that is an excellent idea," Bah Pay declared, somewhat patronisingly. "Let us arrange your sleeping-place at once."

In a few minutes Bah Pay discovered a suitable spot for the Englishmen to bivouac; conveniently close to the rest-house, and yet hidden completely from the view of any one who might be standing there.

"It will do splendidly," Arthur admitted, as he lay down, after a spot of his suggesting had been voted a bad one. "Good-night, Harold; good-night, Ginger Venn; good-night, Bah Pay. Pleasant dreams to all of you. I know what I shall dream about—the poor old *Fox* and dear old Devon."

The next minute he was asleep.

"One of us ought to keep awake and watch," Ginger Venn remarked.

"But which one?" Harold asked, with a smile.

"I'll try," Ginger Venn answered, sleepily.

"I shan't let you. We all want sleep badly, and we

must have it. For once in a way we'll do without a look-out man. Good-night."

"My lord," Bah Pay said, "it pains me to think that I shall have a more comfortable bed than you and your honourable friends."

But Harold and Ginger Venn were asleep before he had finished speaking. Therefore he returned to the rest-house, and, lying down, dreamt that he was back in Rangoon, living the happy life that he had led for many years in the good missionary's house. He was flying a monstrous kite to amuse the little white children, when he awoke, suddenly, to hear, not the shouts of childish glee, but the distant cries of the pursuing enemy. Jumping up quickly from his hard bed on the floor of the rest-house he hurried to the Englishmen and aroused them. They were very sleepy, but when Bah Pay explained his interruption of their slumber by saying, excitedly, "My lords, they are coming up this hill," their drowsiness forsook them at once. They did not enquire who "they" were, but sprang to their feet, ready for flight.

"Lead on, Bah Pay," Harold commanded, but the Burman did not stir a foot.

"My lords," he said, "to escape them by flight is now impossible."

"Then we must stand and fight them," Arthur declared, stoutly, well pleased at the prospect.

"The English lords are very brave," Bah Pay admitted, "but it is foolishness for four men to attempt to fight

more than a hundred. My lords, we need not trouble to fight, for I have thought of a way to drive our pursuers back. Did you notice, as we climbed up this big hill, that the trunk of every tree had been cut deeply with a hatchet?"

"I did," Ginger Venn declared, "and wondered what it all meant."

"I'll tell you. To cut down all those trees one by one would be a very long task, therefore my countrymen, who do not like hard work, nick them, so that when the time comes for them to be cleared they have only to knock down the topmost trees. They fall on those below them, breaking them down with their weight. They in turn fall on to others, and soon there is scarcely a tree standing from the top to the bottom of the hill. My lords, we will knock down the topmost trees, and, as they fall crashing to the bottom, our pursuers will turn round and run down the hill, to escape being crushed to death."

"Bravo! Bah Pay," Arthur exclaimed, "that's a jolly good idea."

"What I want to know," Harold said, in a much less enthusiastic tone, "is how we are going to cut down the first trees?"

"My lord, that is easily explained. On the roof of the rest-house are seven hatchets. I saw them before I went to sleep. It was a foolish thing that the villagers did when they left them there, but it is fortunate for us. My

lords, already we have wasted too much time in talking; now let us act."

Without a moment's delay the four men hurried to the rest-house, and each helped himself to a hatchet from the collection which was partly hidden on the roof. Evidently the villagers intended shortly to start their nicking work on the other side of the hill, and had left their hatchets behind, thinking it very unlikely that they would disappear in the course of a few days.

Ginger Venn quickly set to work, and then, for the first time, Arthur and Harold recognised what a strong fellow their countryman was. His first tree was soon cut down, and as it fell the one beneath it snapped, and tree after tree fell like a pack of cards.

"Hurry up, young gentlemen," Ginger Venn called out, as his second tree started on its downward career. "The rascals are getting closer, and they haven't discovered our little game yet, judging by the noise they're keeping up."

Arthur and Harold succeeded almost at the same moment in chopping down their first tree, and immediately afterwards Ginger Venn's third, and another which he had begun, but permitted Bah Pay to finish off, went crashing down.

"That's enough," Bah Pay declared, delightedly, and the amateur woodmen stopped work to watch the havoc they had caused.

Crashing, screeching, and groaning, the hillside forest

was being swept away by the hurrying, irresistible mass, and what but a few minutes before was a picture of wild grandeur was becoming a scene of destruction. A hurricane could scarcely have caused greater desolation. But, suddenly, above the weird sounds, at times strongly resembling human cries of pain, were heard the terrified shouts of the pursuers, who had now discovered their danger.

"That's more than they bargained for," Ginger Venn declared, as he rubbed his hands with glee. "And now what is the next move, young gentlemen?"

"Bah Pay shall decide," Harold answered, and looked enquiringly at the Burman.

"My lords," Bah Pay declared, evidently much gratified at the confidence placed in him, "we must hurry on faster than ever. We have escaped capture, but have made many deadly enemies by the work we have just done. If we are captured by the fellow-villagers of the men whom the forest crushed, we shall receive little mercy I fear. They will kill us."

"Well, I'd rather be killed any day than be made a slave," Arthur asserted, but Bah Pay shook his head, disapprovingly.

"My lord, I have seen many slaves who were very happy," he said, "and I would rather be made a slave than be killed. But the more words I speak, the more time is wasted. Let us start."

So once more the four sturdy fugitives were on the



Tree after tree fell.—P. 131.

march. It was very comfortable work going down-hill, and easy travelling coupled with their recent and novel defeat of the enemy put them all in very good humour.

"I wonder," Arthur said, "what the fellows on the *Fox* will say if ever we have the good fortune to tell them how we licked the enemy to-day."

"They'll say a good many things," Harold replied, "but they won't believe us."

"And when I get back to London, sir," Ginger Venn joined in, "I dare say that some of my relations and friends won't believe that I've been a heathen god."

"I don't suppose that any of them will," Harold answered, unsympathetically, "and if you take my advice, you won't tell them that you were. Some men who travel tell awful whoppers, consequently people who stick at home think that all travellers do."

"Well," Arthur said, "if I were at home and Ginger Venn came and told me that he had been a god, I should kick him out of——"

"You'd try to, sir, you mean," Ginger Venn interrupted, with a broad grin, and Harold laughed aloud at Arthur's discomfiture.

"My lord, do not forgot where we are," Bah Pay besought, in a whisper. "In the jungle it is necessary to be cautious always. Your laughter could be heard at a great distance."

"I am very sorry, Bah Pay," Harold declared, serious in

a moment. "It was very foolish of me, but I hope that no harm has been done."

"My lord, so do I, but it is impossible to tell."

That rather discouraging reply plunged the whole party into seriousness bordering on gloom, and the only words that were spoken, for some time, were uttered in whispers. Hour after hour they trudged on, until, footsore and hungry, they began to wonder whether they would ever get back to civilisation.

"Are you quite sure, Bah Pay," Harold said, "that you have not lost your way?"

"My lord, I am," the Burman answered, with great confidence. "The things that we have passed—the hills, the pagodas, and the rest-houses—are what I was told we should pass. Soon we shall arrive at a narrow path that runs between two hills. When we have passed through that we shall find a village a little further on. Then I will leave you for a time, to fetch you food."

"But don't be so long away as you were last time," Arthur said, "or else I, for one, will die of starvation. I feel like a skeleton already."

"I wasn't aware that skeletons suffered from hunger," Harold remarked; Arthur retorting that experience had convinced him that there were many things of which he—Harold—was not aware.

Having relieved their feelings by this trifling passage-at-arms, Arthur and Harold became more cheerful, and Ginger Venn and Bah Pay brightened up, possibly out of

sympathy. But although the gloom which had been hanging over them was dispelled, they took care not to become noisy, and the jokes and chaffing recriminations in which they indulged were carried on almost in whispers.

With better spirits came fresh vigour, and the next few miles were covered in very good time, considering the nature of the jungle, and the condition of their boots. In fact by this time Arthur and Harold presented a very disreputable appearance, so ragged had their uniforms become.

"My lords," Bah Pay joined in, hearing them deplore the state of their uniforms, "when I go into the next village I will get you some new Burmese clothes."

"I shan't wear them if you do," Arthur declared, and then, thinking that Bah Pay might be hurt at his bluntness, added, "I don't mean the slightest disrespect to your native dress—in fact, I think it's a very sensible one for the climate—but I don't intend to take off the Queen's uniform while I'm in an enemy's country."

"Nor I, either," Harold said, "unless I am compelled. It doesn't do to make rash vows in this land of surprises, for we don't know how we shall be situated in a few hours. I'd let the French shoot me sooner than take off my uniform at their command, but I'd discard it if I saw a chance of getting back to the *Fox* by donning Burmese clothes."

"Then you mean to say that you agree with Bah Pay's suggestion——"

"Hush!" Ginger Venn exclaimed, in a hoarse whisper. "I heard a man's voice in the jungle."

They halted with military briskness and listened breathlessly, but not a sound could be heard.

"Ginger Venn," Bah Pay said, when they had kept perfect silence for three or four minutes, "you must have been mistaken."

"I was not," Ginger Venn declared, firmly. "I heard a man—one of your countrymen—speak. That was where he was."

"Then we'll see if he's still there," Arthur exclaimed, and plunged into the jungle at the spot indicated by Ginger Venn. Harold, knowing from experience that his friend would have his own way, made no attempt to stop him, but followed in his track. Ginger Venn and Bah Pay were more cautious, and proceeded but a short distance into the jungle, so that they should not again lose their way.

"Let's keep on a-shouting to the young gentlemen," Ginger Venn said to Bah Pay. "They won't come back if we tell them to, but we must let them know where we are, so that they can find us when they want to."

"My lords," Bah Pay shouted, acting on Ginger Venn's suggestion, "can you see any one?"

"No," Arthur's reply came, softly.

"They've gone too far already," Ginger Venn muttered, and, having cleared his throat, hallooed at the top of his voice, "Then I made a mistake after all."

Bah Pay looked surprised, for Ginger Venn had spoken

with such confidence a few minutes before. Ginger Venn noticed the Burman's astonishment, and said, in explanation of his sudden change of opinion—

"I don't want the young gentlemen to get lost. If they think I made a mistake they'll give up the hunt and come back. But between you and me, Bah Pay, I didn't make a mistake. I heard a Burmese fellow speak, and I'd stick to it, only I don't want to."

"Where are you now?" Harold was heard to shout, at that moment, and Ginger Venn and Bah Pay answered together—

"Here!"

"We're coming back. Keep on singing out to guide us."

The men did as requested, and soon the two midshipmen were once again with them.

"Look here, Ginger Venn," Arthur exclaimed, with mock seriousness, "the next time you hear a monkey squeak don't say it's a man talking."

"Well, sir," Ginger Venn apologised, "some people do say that men are only a kind of educated monkeys, so perhaps there's some excuse for my making the mistake."

"Excuse or no excuse, your mistake has made me twice as hungry as I was before, so let's hurry on and make up for lost time. I'm dying with hunger."

Ginger Venn stifled a hearty laugh, for, in spite of illness and the rough time he had had lately, Arthur was particularly plump.

Bah Pay also was inclined to laughter, but checked it by asking if the English lords were ready to proceed, and being answered with a chorus of "Yes," he started off along the path, followed by Harold, Arthur, and Ginger Venn.

The first mile was covered quickly and, fortunately, without any disturbing incident. Once a parrot screamed, and Arthur exclaimed, immediately, "Ginger Venn, there's another fellow speaking."

Ginger Venn smiled, and wished from the bottom of his heart that he could think it was a parrot that he had heard on the first occasion. He tried, however, to convince himself that the man he had heard was only some harmless villager strolling in the jungle for pleasure, but could not drive away the belief that he and whoever was with him were spies. And such, indeed, they were. The news of the Englishmen's escape, and the Queen's command that they should be captured and taken to her, had travelled further than Bah Pay had imagined, and, for miles ahead of them, the country was being scoured by excited bodies of men, anxious to please their Queen and win the reward that she had offered. Four Burmans, hidden near the path, discovered the three Englishmen and Bah Pay shortly after they had descended the hill. To attempt to capture them was a thing that they had no intention whatever of doing until largely reinforced, for the news of the terrible fighting powers of the English had spread from Rangoon all over the country. Some

people, hearing of the marvellous exploits of the white men, declared that they must be evil spirits, for, with every repetition, the story of our gallant soldiers' capture of the Shway Dagon Pagoda received picturesque additions, which would have astounded the brave fellows themselves had they heard them. The four Burmans, peering out of the jungle at Arthur and Harold, were shaken in that belief by the middies' very boyish and human looks, but being aware that it was unwise to judge from appearances—they had a proverb of their own which told them so—they came to the conclusion that forty men at least would be required to capture them.

Two of them, therefore, started off at a run to the nearest villages, to proclaim their discovery and obtain help to capture the fugitives. The other two men remained to keep a watch on the white men, and, as we know, were very nearly discovered through the carelessness of one of them. Carelessness is, perhaps, an unjust word to use, for the sudden appearance of a cheetah a few yards in front of a fellow is calculated to startle him considerably. Therefore we will say that excitement, and not carelessness, caused the foremost Burman to call to his friend for help when he found himself face to face with such an unwelcome thing as a cheetah. As it happened, he needed no help, for the animal—equally astonished at the meeting—after a moment's survey of him made off in great haste, without the slightest attempt to contest men's right to invade the domain of his ancestors.

But relieved as the two Burmans were by the undignified departure of the cheetah, they were compelled to follow the beast, for fear of falling into the Englishmen's hands. They knew that the cry of surprise could not escape being heard by the white men, and, therefore, they rushed further into the jungle and concealed themselves. From a distance they saw the Englishmen searching for them, and, when the search was ended, they crept out of their hiding-places and resumed their duty of keeping a close watch on the fugitives. Soon they were joined by armed men, who had hastened from the nearest village at the appeal of their two comrades. All came silently, and obeyed, without a murmur, the signs of the two men who had sent for them. Every minute, almost, the stealthy band was swelled by fresh arrivals, and, before an hour and a half had elapsed, eighty Burmans had assembled to capture the three Englishmen and their guide. The men who had first discovered the fugitives took command of the silent gang, and proceeded, at once, to make arrangements which they hoped would ensure their undertaking being crowned with success.

CHAPTER IX

TRAPPED IN A PASS

IN happy ignorance of the elaborate preparations which were being made for their capture, Arthur, Harold, Ginger Venn, and Bah Pay trudged on pluckily, well-pleased that more than an hour had passed without anything occurring to shake their belief that they were many miles ahead of their pursuers. The fallen forest, Bah Pay assured them, would be impassable for hours, and, moreover, their enemy would be kept from cutting their way through the *débris* by the necessity of attending to those who had been injured in the torrent of falling trees.

“My lords,” he added, “they will never overtake us now. When we have eaten the food that I shall get for you at the village which we shall soon reach, we will hurry on again, and, perhaps, to-night or to-morrow, we shall meet the Chinamen travelling to Ava. Ah! my lords, there are the two hills that I was told we should see. Soon we shall arrive at the narrow passage we have to pass through. Let us hurry.”

They did hurry, and, after an hour's comparatively brisk walking, reached the pass between the hills. Whether it was the work of nature, or had been cut by some prehistoric race of men which once inhabited the land, it is impossible to say. It was about five hundred yards long, some ten feet wide, and with steep rugged walls rising thirty or forty feet on either side. And scattered about the path were huge stones, which had fallen, apparently, from the sides of the pass.

"Let's scud through it," Arthur suggested, "for, if one of those whopping lumps falls on us, our jolly little party will be reduced by one at least."

"All right," Harold said, "you set the pace." So Arthur started off along the rough pass, but, remembering that Ginger Venn was a very poor runner, he did not go at anything like the rate he would have done had there been only Harold and Bah Pay to follow. Soon they had to stop running entirely, for, on getting half-way through the pass, they found the ground so encumbered with the huge stones that even walking became a difficulty. A little further on the pass was still narrower, and there a gruesome sight presented itself to the fugitives. Strewn about the path for some yards were the skeletons of men who had been crushed to death by massive stones. When they died it was impossible for the four horrified travellers to form any opinion, so quickly do the carrion birds and vermin strip the human body of every vestige of flesh.

"It's horrible," Arthur gasped; "for goodness' sake let us get away."

So, with mingled feelings of reverence and horror, the fugitives commenced to pick their way carefully along this modern Golgotha. They had gone but a few steps, however, when a loud, triumphant shout rang out above them, and, looking up, they beheld, to their dismay, some thirty or forty Burmans, each with a huge stone ready to push over the brink and crush them. Some of the men were ahead of them, and others in the rear. And the next moment two parties of Burmans, each about twenty in number, entered the pass before and behind them.

"Trapped, by Jove!" Harold muttered; and trapped indeed they were.

"Let's make a bolt for it," Arthur suggested.

"Just as you like, sir," Ginger Venn said, gravely, "but I tell you, young gentlemen, that it'll mean certain death for us. Don't you think, though, that I'm afraid, because I ain't. If you do decide to make a rush for it I'll lead the way with pleasure, but I think it's a pity for a couple of young gents like you to go and throw your lives away."

"Yes," Harold said, quietly, "it would mean certain death."

"It would be as bad as suicide, sir," Ginger Venn declared. "The Burmese fellows know that we haven't a chance, and that's why they're shouting to Bah Pay to tell us to surrender. That is what they're saying, isn't it, Bah Pay?"

"Ginger Venn, it is," Bah Pay answered. "They say,

that if we attempt to escape, they will roll the stones down on to us and crush us. My lords, they say, also, that the bones laying at our feet are those of Chinamen they killed three months ago."

"The murdering scoundrels!" Arthur fumed. "Oh, if we only had revolving pistols! Then we could pick some of them off, and charge through those fellows in front before the others recovered from their surprise."

"It's no good sighing for what we haven't got," Harold reminded him. "The thing is to decide at once what we shall do now. Shall we surrender or die?"

"Die," Arthur declared, emphatically.

For a few moments there was silence. Then the leader shouted to Bah Pay that, if the white *kalas* did not submit at once, they would be crushed to death as the Chinamen were.

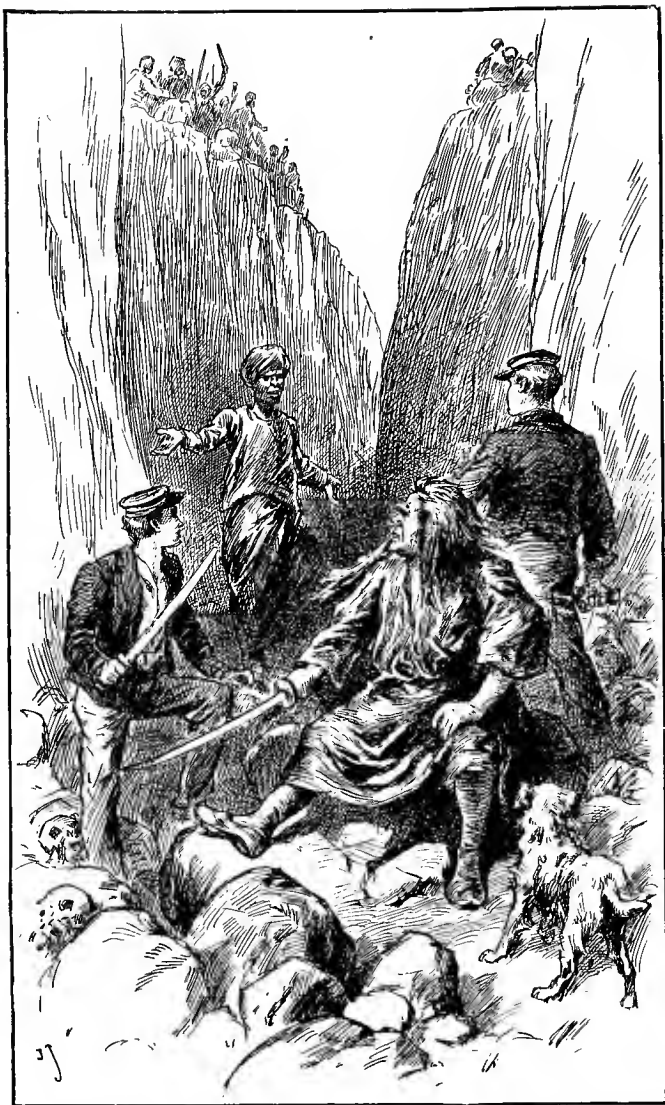
Bah Pay translated this threat to the Englishmen, and urged them to decide one way or the other quickly.

"Come on," Arthur begged, "I'm going."

"You're not," Harold declared, grasping him tightly by the arm. "Remember that I am your senior, and that we still wear Her Majesty's uniform. I command you not to move a step until I give the word."

"Very well," Arthur answered, gruffly, and resigned himself to whatever his friend should decide.

"Ask them, Bah Pay," Harold said, as soon as his anxiety about Arthur was at an end, "what they intend to do with us if we surrender."



"They say, that if we attempt to escape, they will roll the stones down on to us and crush us."

"My lords, they promise to do us no harm," Bah Pay replied, a few moments later. "We shall be well treated, and taken as quickly as possible to the Queen, at Ava."

"And made slaves," Arthur groaned.

"My lord," Bah Pay said, addressing himself to Harold, "when we are at Ava we shall be near the river Irrawaddy. It is possible that we shall be able to escape from the city by boat."

Harold had nearly made up his mind, and Bah Pay's reminder decided him.

"We will surrender," he declared. "Tell them so, Bah Pay."

The Burmans received the news without any demonstrations of joy—possibly because they had been so sure that the white men could not escape—and called upon their prisoners to throw down their arms and advance.

"We must do so," Harold said, and was the first to comply with the demand.

Arthur was the last, and as he threw down his *dah* he exclaimed earnestly, "Thank goodness it is only a wretched native weapon. If it had been a cutlass or a British sword, I'm blowed if I'd have chucked it away for any one."

Having thrown away their arms, the Englishmen were anxious to get the whole business over as quickly as possible, and walked briskly forward to the Burmans who were awaiting them. Those who had cut off their retreat immediately rushed forward and picked up the weapons they had thrown away. And then those on the hills on

either side of the pass, seeing that the Englishmen were unarmed, left their massive stones and scampered along until they reached a winding path, down which they swarmed, joining the band that awaited the prisoners' arrival.

As the Englishmen and Bah Pay marched up to them they opened out and formed a circle round them, but not a hand was laid upon them.

Moung Koon, the chief of the Burmese party, a fat, jovial-looking little fellow, saluted them very politely, and assured them that if they promised to make no attempt to escape they would be well treated and not even bound. But Harold hesitated to give that promise, for he was already considering what chances of escape they had. Noticing his hesitation, the Burman laughed, and said to Bah Pay, "Tell the white *kalas* that I will not insist upon having their promise. I will not bind them, but if they attempt to escape they will be killed—stabbed with spears and cut with *dahs*—and left for the vile, flesh-eating birds to feed on."

"Well," Arthur said, when Bah Pay had interpreted the chief's decision, "as he appears to be a jolly good kind of fellow, you might ask him to give us something to eat. Tell him we're starving."

Bah Pay did so, and immediately the merry Moung Koon was filled with remorse for having forgotten to offer food to his prisoners.

"Hi! hi!" he shouted to the men who carried the

provisions. "Food for the white *kalas*. Quick, quick, or I'll cut off your legs."

It was a habit of Mounng Koon to indulge in bloodthirsty threats, but, as he had never yet carried out one of them, his men were not at all alarmed about the safety of their limbs. They prepared the food in their usual leisurely fashion, and then bore it to the prisoners, serving Ginger Venn first, for every man among them was convinced in his own mind that the white *kala* with the extraordinary hair was a person of high rank. As he ate his food they watched him in wonder, not because he took huge mouthfuls, but because the arrangement of his hair and whiskers had a strong fascination for them. As he looked much fiercer than his young countrymen, they decided among themselves that he was a famous soldier, and as he wore Burmese clothes they came to the conclusion that he was also a man of great wisdom. But although most of the Burmans devoted their attention solely to gazing at Ginger Venn, there were quite sufficient left to keep guard over Arthur, Harold, and Bah Pay. By this time Arthur and Harold had become quite accustomed to Burmese food, and they ate with relish what was offered. They made a big meal, and felt very much better for it. Prince, too, became quite lively, and, seeing a pariah dog, he rushed at it and challenged it to a fight in the proper canine fashion. The pariah accepted the challenge, but lived to regret his rashness, for Prince gave him such a mauling that in less than a minute he was glad to escape to lick his damaged

ears in one of the many secluded spots which he frequented for slumber. The Burmans dearly love anything in the way of a fight, and Prince's business-like manner of dealing with his opponent won their unstinted admiration.

"Put him through his tricks, Ginger Venn," Arthur suggested, and the suggestion was acted upon immediately, to the great astonishment of the Burmese onlookers, who had never in their lives seen anything to equal it. After that they regarded Ginger Venn with still greater awe, for a man who could make such a vile, worthless creature, as they considered a dog to be, do such remarkable things was assuredly a very superior person. Mounng Koon was quite convinced of it, and being a very shrewd, as well as a very jolly, fellow, he determined to treat Ginger Venn with great respect, so that if ever he had the misfortune to see Ava captured by the English *kalas*, he would have some one to save him from being executed.

"Hi! hi!" he shouted to his dooly-bearers. "The white *kala* with-hair-on-one-side-of-his-face-and-whiskers-on-the-other will ride. Hurry, you dogs, or I'll slit your noses."

The bearers rose from their squatting positions, and, raising the dooly, bore it to Ginger Venn and signed to him to take his seat in it. But Ginger Venn, instead of complying with their request, waved them away.

"Do they think I'm too old and fat to walk?" he enquired, indignantly, of Bah Pay.

"No," Bah Pay answered, "they wish to honour you."

"What for?" Ginger Venn asked, suspiciously.

"Because they believe that you're a man of high rank."

"What silly idiots! Tell them I ain't. Tell them that my father was a sweep, and my mother a washer-woman; that I went to a ragged school, but they couldn't learn me very much because I was always playing the wag. Tell them that I'm a low-born, alley-bred, gutter-playing, street-hawking kind of fellow in London, and that because I'm in the company of two real young gentlemen now, it doesn't follow that I'm a swell myself."

"If Bah Pay were to tell them all that," Harold observed, "they would possibly think that a man who is, or was, so many things must be a very great personage. Get into the dooly, and don't say anything to them, in case you're made a god once more."

"My lords," Bah Pay joined in, "the people think that Ginger Venn is a great general."

"What next?" Ginger Venn grunted, as he entered the dooly. "Why can't they leave me alone? I don't want to be anybody but myself, and they won't let me be that. Anyhow," he continued, brightening up, "I'd rather be a general any day than a heathen god. Do they think I'm the Duke of Wellington?"

Before Bah Pay could answer him, Moungh Koon shouted for the march to be resumed. The bearers started off with the dooly, and Arthur, Harold, and Bah Pay trudged behind it, highly amused at Ginger Venn's annoyance. Moungh Koon walked with them, keeping Bah Pay very

busy by asking questions and volunteering information. He declared, with great satisfaction, that the trapping of the Englishmen was planned entirely by him as soon as he heard that they were travelling in that direction.

"I am glad that I did not have to smash the white *kalas*," he confessed, "for the Queen will give us more for them alive than the King would pay for them dead."

After a time, Arthur and Harold, with the assistance of Bah Pay, began plying Mounng Koon with questions, all of which he answered without the slightest hesitation. He admitted that his country had received a great defeat at Rangoon, but declared that it would be avenged and every English *kala* in the land killed.

"Not every one," he hastened to add, "for the mighty *kala* with-hair-on-one-side-of-his-face-and-whiskers-on-the-other will not be killed. Nor will you, and the *kala* who wears rags like you, be killed. You will be made slaves."

"What shall we have to do?" Harold enquired.

"Who can tell? Whatever the Queen pleases, the white *kalas* will have to do."

"Has the Queen any other white slaves?"

"Not now. She had some, but they displeased her, so she had them beaten to death with wooden hammers. They tried to escape, and that was why she ordered them to be killed."

"That's a bright look-out for us," Arthur said to Harold. "We must escape, somehow or other, before we reach Ava.

I don't mean to be beaten to death with wooden hammers."

"It wouldn't be pleasant, certainly," Harold agreed. "Let's have a chat with Ginger Venn about it."

Without a word of warning to their captors, Arthur and Harold opened out to get on either side of the dooly. In a moment there was tremendous excitement, for the Burmans, believing that an attempt to escape was about to be made, shouted threateningly and closed round the prisoners, some brandishing *dahs*, others with spears poised, and not a few with muskets raised. Mounng Koon, his face very serious, stood in front of Harold with *dah* uplifted, determined to slash off his head if he attempted to move any further.

Ginger Venn, who had been sleeping comfortably in the dooly, was awakened by the uproar, but, fortunately for all concerned, before he discovered that his young countrymen were being threatened, Bah Pay shouted excitedly—

"Mounng Koon, do not harm the two white *kalas*. All they want is to speak to the *kala* with the strange hair. They did not try to escape, for they are full of wisdom, and know that to think of doing so would be great foolishness."

"Then tell the white *kalas* to get back to their places," Mounng Koon replied, "and if they move again without my permission, I'll put gunpowder in their ears and blow their heads off."

Bah Pay translated this threat to the Englishmen, and added thereto a request of his own.

"My lords," he said, "you are very brave, I know, for all English *kalas* are brave, but sometimes a weak man who uses his brains can do more than the man with the strongest arms. Brave as you are, the men who guard us are too many for you to fight and overcome; therefore, we must escape by being artful instead of being brave. My lords, trust me, and, if you remain quiet, before many days have passed I will have planned our escape."

"Presumptuous dog!" MOUNG KOON exclaimed, addressing Bah Pay. "I do not understand the white *kalas'* language, but I can see that you are saying much, although I said but little. I have not forgotten that you told me that the white *kalas'* language said in few words what the Burmese said in many. Tell me now, at once, will the white *kalas* promise not to move out of their places without my permission?"

"MOUNG KOON, they will," Bah Pay answered.

"It is good. Now we will proceed."

In a very few minutes MOUNG KOON was again on very good terms with his prisoners, although he appeared rather sorry, at first, that he had lost the opportunity of cutting off a white *kala's* head.

CHAPTER X

A REVOLT OF HEREDITARY SLAVES

MOUNG KOON was well aware that the climate of his native land proved fatal to many white men, and, therefore, he was anxious to get to Ava as quickly as possible, for if any one of his prisoners was to die while in his charge he would be held responsible. And as the Queen did not place a very high value on the heads of her husband's officers, MOUNG KOON knew that, in all probability, he would lose his. If, however, she happened to be in a good humour, he might escape with the moderate punishment of having a leg or an arm chopped off. But the loss of one limb was, naturally, a prospect that was very distasteful to MOUNG KOON, and he vowed that the march should be continued night and day until the next village was reached. Many of his men protested against such unusual exertion, but MOUNG KOON would not listen to their grumblings, declaring that he had given his orders, and if they disobeyed them they would be punished severely. He described, with considerable detail, the various punishments which he would mete out to them, and truly they

were as ghastly as any man could imagine. For once in a way his men were impressed by his threats, and, believing that further protests would be dangerous, exerted themselves to get to the next village as speedily as possible. Throughout the night they hurried on, and, after a march of nearly ten hours' duration, arrived at their destination tired and hungry. The head-man of the village quickly had them supplied with refreshment, and, having partaken of it, they lay down and were soon asleep. The head-man, at MOUNG KOON'S request, took charge of the Englishmen and Bah Pay, placing them for safety in a big wicker cage, and making every able-bodied man in the village watch around it, fully armed, to prevent their escape.

About mid-day, MOUNG KOON, having had a very sound sleep, came running to the cage, and seeing his prisoners slumbering, was seized with a horrible fear that they were dead.

"Hi! hi!" he cried; "a stick, a stick."

A long bamboo was given him, and, pushing it through the bars, he began vigorously to stir up the sleepers, who woke with a start, one by one, wondering what new calamity had fallen on them. Then, seeing that his prisoners were all alive, MOUNG KOON smiled pleasantly, and apologised for having disturbed them.

"We'll accept his apologies," Arthur said to Bah Pay, "on condition that he gives us some food at once."

When that was repeated to MOUNG KOON, he called to the tired men who had kept guard over the prisoners,



Pushing it through the bars, he began vigorously to stir up the sleepers.

"Hi! hi! Food for the white *kalas*! Quick, quick, you fat sons of the jungle, or I'll roast you alive."

This threat caused terrible consternation among the villagers. They rushed wildly hither and thither, begging food from the women-folk, and, if it were not given willingly, taking it by force. Soon they came hurrying back to the cage with sufficient food to last the prisoners for a week.

"It's taken my appetite away, looking at it," Harold said.

"It hasn't mine," Arthur declared, and set to work, with gusto, to reduce the heap.

But, in spite of Arthur's prodigious appetite, it was very clear to Moungh Koon that there was more food than his prisoners would require, so he ordered a large quantity of it to be doled out to his own followers.

When all had eaten as much as they could without running the risk of feeling inactive, Moungh Koon ordered them to make ready to resume the march, and immediately all was bustle. Some energetically polished their *dahs*, others gingerly cleaned their muskets, while a few filled the water-skins and packed up sufficient provisions to last for a two days' journey. The women and children, attired in their best garments, crowded round the Englishmen to take a last look at them, some pressing upon them cheroots and sweetmeats.

"They're a jolly nice lot of little people," Arthur declared, as he finished lighting his cheroot from one

which a pretty little girl was smoking, "and if ever I can do them a good turn I will."

The opportunity to do so soon presented itself. As Moungh Koon's force was forming up, preparatory to departing, two Burmans rushed into the village in a state of tremendous excitement. Each had terror depicted on his face, and one of them had a dirty piece of cloth bound tightly over a wound on his right arm.

"Hi! hi!" Moungh Koon shouted to them, "what news do you dogs bring?"

But the newcomers, unaware that Moungh Koon was a very important person, took no notice of his question, and ran straightway to the head-man. The news which they gave him was, evidently, of a very serious nature, for it crushed out of him all the dignity he possessed, and set him wailing, "What shall we do?"

Moungh Koon, his curiosity aroused, walked quickly over to the undignified head-man, followed closely by Bah Pay and his custodians.

The head-man, brightening up as if he saw a way out of his difficulty, repeated to Moungh Koon the news that he had just received.

Moungh Koon, also, considered the news very serious, but, unlike the head-man, became more dignified. He questioned the bearers of the news, but apparently discovered no ray of hope in the dark story which they told. He turned away to join his own men, but the head-man, in a frantic state, flung himself at his feet and

implored him not to leave them. Other men followed his example, while women wept and children howled.

"Something serious has happened," Arthur remarked. "I'm going to find out what it is." He attempted to walk towards the scene of the excitement, but, at the first step he took, his guardians flourished their *dahs* and declared that to take another meant certain death to him.

"All right, all right! Don't get excited," Arthur answered, for, although he did not understand their language, their actions were sufficiently plain to him. "If you won't permit me to walk, I shall have to shout. Bay Pay, come here and tell us what's the matter. Hurry up."

Bah Pay obeyed as quickly as his custodians would permit.

"My lords," he said, "this village is going to be attacked——"

"By the English?" Harold interrupted, eagerly.

"No, my lord," Bah Pay answered, sorrowfully, "by a gang of rebellious slaves—vile creatures, who are little better than the dogs."

Arthur and Harold were surprised to hear Bah Pay talk in that fashion, for his English education and many years' residence in a missionary's house should, they thought, have taught him to pity rather than revile slaves.

"You're very hard on the poor wretches," Harold remarked, "but perhaps you know something about them that I do not."

"My lord, that is true. The slaves that are coming towards this village have murdered old men, women, and children. They have given no mercy, and have vowed that not one of the people of this village shall be spared."

"But what caused them to rebel?" Harold asked. "And how was it that their masters could not subdue them?"

"My lord, these slaves are pagoda slaves. But I see that you do not know what they are. I will explain. It has been the custom of my countrymen for hundreds of years to spare some of the prisoners whom they have taken in battle and make them life-long slaves. These men were not only doomed to slavery, but their children, and their children's children—in fact, their descendants for evermore were to be slaves. And these slaves, both the newly-captured and the hereditary ones, are forced to keep clean the pagodas, or to do any other work required of them by the authorities. They are looked down upon by the lowest and vilest of my countrymen, who will have no intercourse whatever with them. The hereditary slave marries the daughter of an hereditary slave, and neither ever dreams of freedom—at least, I should say that we thought they did not. My lords, it is clear to us now, that the hope of freedom had not entirely passed from them, for, hearing that my countrymen, their oppressors, were being defeated by your honourable soldiers, they have done what they never did before—rebelled. In some mysterious way the call to revolt has passed from place to place, and more than two hundred of them are now

banded together to revenge the hardships which they and their ancestors have suffered."

"And I hope they'll do it," Arthur burst out. "Hereditary slavery! It's scandalous."

"Of what nationality are they?" Harold asked, deeply interested.

"My lord, that is a question which no man can answer," Bah Pay replied. "Nearly all races are mingled in one. Some of the slaves are descended from Peguans and Siamese captured in Alompura's wars, and others from Chinamen, natives of India, Manipur men, Shans, Portuguese, French, and English."

"English!" Arthur and Harold exclaimed together, Harold adding—

"When were English captured by the Burmese?"

"A hundred years ago. They were sailors, captured by the treachery of other Europeans. They were sent up country, and married the daughters of brown slaves; and their children's children do not know that the blood of Englishmen still flows in their veins. If they did know they would not be proud of it, for they have no intelligence, and the life that they lead has reduced them to the level of the lowest animals."

"Perhaps they can be raised even yet," Harold suggested, but Bah Pay shook his head decisively.

"My lord," he said, "I do not think so, for, now that they have rebelled, they are more villainous than any men who have ever lived. They have attacked two

villages, and murdered in cold blood every human being whom they found there. The horrible things that they did are too awful for me to repeat. In a few hours the people of this village will be dead also, I fear, for where is there a place to which they can fly? They are begging MOUNG KOON to remain and defend them, but he declares that he cannot do so, for fear that you, my lords, and Ginger Venn might escape during the fight."

"What a despicable excuse!" Arthur exclaimed. "Harold, we can't be a party to leaving these good-hearted little people to be slaughtered. MOUNG KOON must be a miserable cur to think of leaving them to such a fate."

"I quite agree with you," Harold answered. "Bah Pay, kindly ask MOUNG KOON to let me have a few minutes' talk with him."

Bah Pay, accompanied by his custodians, hurried over to MOUNG KOON and delivered the message.

"I will permit the white *kala* to speak," MOUNG KOON replied, and walked back with Bah Pay to the prisoners.

"MOUNG KOON," Harold began, after having been admonished to say what he wanted as quickly as possible, "you have treated my countrymen and me very kindly, and I cannot believe that you intend to leave these poor people—your countrymen—to be butchered——"

"How can I defend them," MOUNG KOON interrupted, "while I have you and your countrymen to guard? If you escape, the Queen will have me executed."

"If that is your only difficulty, it can be overcome easily. Mounk Koon, I promise you that if you will remain here with your men and defend these people from the attack impending, neither I nor my two countrymen will make any attempt to escape. We will fight side by side with you, and, when the slaves have been driven away, we will become prisoners once more, and you can guard us again as you are doing now."

"Bravo, Harold!" Arthur exclaimed, earnestly, and Ginger Venn, who was listening from his dooly, nodded his full agreement with the suggestion.

Mounk Koon, however, was very undecided.

"Will the white *kala* with hair-on-one-side-of-his-face-and-whiskers-on-the-other promise not to escape?"

"I'll promise anything you like," Ginger Venn answered, obligingly.

"My lord, he will promise," Bah Pay interpreted.

"Will he take an oath? Will all the white *kalas* take an oath not to escape, even if they are free?"

"My lord, they will," was the answer, after a few moments' conversation.

"It is good," Mounk Koon answered. "They shall take the oath immediately."

From a capacious jacket-pocket he produced a palm-leaf, on which was engraved a Burmese oath. He read it out, and, as Bah Pay interpreted, Arthur, Harold and Ginger Venn, standing in a row, repeated it, thereby expressing the desire that if they broke their promise and attempted

to escape they might be killed in at least fifty different, and all ghastly, ways. They wondered, as they repeated the oath, what was the use of asking to be killed in so many ways, when one would have been quite sufficient. But even Arthur felt that the occasion was too serious to waste time in asking questions.

"My lords," Mounk Koon exclaimed, beaming with pleasure, for the Englishmen's action had taken a load off his mind, "you are free until the presumptuous slaves are defeated. Now we will prepare for their arrival."

His preparations were, however, of a very crude nature, his chief idea being to assemble all his men at the point where the rebellious slaves were expected to enter the village, and awe them by a display of numbers and noise. It was seen, from this, that Mounk Koon was a very incapable leader, and that if some alterations were not made in his plans for the protection of the village it would undoubtedly be destroyed.

The Englishmen intimated to him, very politely, that such was their opinion.

"What the white *kalas* say is full of truth," he replied, not in the least annoyed at their interference. "But what else can I do? If the slaves had to traverse a narrow pass I could kill them, or capture them as I captured the white *kalas*."

At the recollection of how he had trapped the Englishmen his face beamed with delight, for he regarded it as a strategical triumph, concealing, as much as possible,

the fact that he had only copied what another Burmese leader had planned and carried out on a previous occasion.

"Why don't you erect a stockade?" Harold asked, and this very natural suggestion struck Mounk Koon as being a brilliant one. But he did not say so to Harold, preferring to make the Englishmen believe that he thought it came from Ginger Venn. It would have been very undignified to accept advice from such a young fellow as Harold, but quite another thing to take it from a man of Ginger Venn's age and, imaginary, military rank.

"If the white *kala* with-hair-on-one-side-of-his-face-and-whiskers-on-the-other will discuss warlike matters with me," he said, in a very gracious manner, "I shall be glad to make use of his experience."

Ginger Venn was very indignant.

"Tell the grinning old ass," he said to Bah Pay, "that I ain't a soldier, and never have been—worse luck. Try to make him understand that I ain't a swell at all, even if I have been a heathen god. Tell him that I don't know anything about military matters, but if he wants some real good advice about such things he hasn't got far to go for it. There are two officers of Her Majesty's navy, and, even if they are young, they can teach him all he'll ever want to know. Tell him that at once, and just give him a hint as well that I don't like being made a fuss of. They can make as big a fuss about those young gents as they like, but as for me, well, I'm a respectable working-

man—at least I was before I left dear old London—and don't like being pushed above my position."

Bah Pay was far too wide-awake to risk arousing MOUNG KOON's displeasure by repeating all that GINGER VENN had uttered in his anger.

"My lord," he said, very respectfully, "the white *kala* with-hair-on-one-side-of-his-face-and-whiskers-on-the-other thanks you for the honour you have done him. But he declares that the two young white *kalas* are much wiser men and greater fighters than he, and, therefore, he begs you to consult them instead of him."

MOUNG KOON was not at all disposed to act on the suggestion just made to him, and was on the point of threatening GINGER VENN with dire punishment, when three men rushed into the village with the terrifying news that the army of slaves was approaching rapidly, and would reach the village in half-an-hour at the latest.

"My lord, they are killing every man, woman and child whom they meet," one of the bearers of the ill news declared, "and they have vowed to kill us also."

At these words the crowd of listeners broke out again into lamentations, and implored MOUNG KOON to save them. But MOUNG KOON himself was now reduced to a hopeless state of abject terror, unable either to act or to command others to do so. And the frightened people, waiting for some sign of help from him, knew that every moment brought the savage gang of slaves nearer to them.

At last, with one accord, the people turned from

Moung Koon and implored the Englishmen—their prisoners—to save them.

“We will do so,” Harold declared, stepping forward, and, without asking for or receiving Moung Koon’s permission, he assumed the command of his men and the villagers.

“Get all the old people and women and children together and bring them here,” he commanded, and immediately a number of men rushed off to obey him, returning soon with grandfathers and grandmothers—some hale and hearty, others frail and feeble—and with wives, sisters, and children. All these were, by Harold’s command, made comfortable in an open space in the centre of the village, and the building of a big stockade was begun around it immediately. Huts innumerable were demolished to furnish material, and every man worked willingly. But it was not destined to reach anything like completion, for, scarcely had the first piles been driven in, when the shouts of the approaching army of slaves were heard in the distance.

“Cease work!” Harold commanded, instantly, for as the stockade could not be completed in time he was anxious for his men to have a rest before the conflict began. Then, calling aside Arthur, Ginger Venn and Bah Pay, Harold explained his plan of defence to them, and the position which he wished each of them to take up. “It will be a stiff fight,” he said, after he had made clear his plans, “for the enemy, I imagine, are as desperate a lot of rascals as

ever trod the earth. After long years of oppression they have tasted the sweets of revenge, and the love of power and slaughter has gained such a hold on them that nothing but death will end it. Well, good-bye, all of you, in case any of us should not be alive after the fight. Don't shake hands, for fear the men might understand and get dispirited."

"So-long, sir," Ginger Venn replied, "you're a true English sailor to take on a tough job like this; I'm blowed if you ain't."

"Good-bye, Harold," Arthur said, with unwonted seriousness. "We've been chums for a long while now, old fellow, and I hope we shall continue so for many years, but if we shouldn't—if I'm snuffed out, you'll tell my people when you get home that I died in the good old Devonshire way—face to the enemy."

"I will," Harold answered, "and if I die, Arthur, you'll——"

But Harold's sentence was never finished, for, at that moment, the outposts came rushing in with the news that the enemy was close at hand.

"To your posts," Harold commanded, and Arthur and Ginger Venn hurried away to the duties allotted them, Bah Pay remaining at Harold's side to interpret his commands.

CHAPTER XI

THE SLAVES DEFEATED

QUICKLY, but without any unnecessary noise, the little army of which Midshipman Harold Millett was in command was got into position to await the attack of the foe. It was formed in square, the women, the children and the old men being placed in the middle of it under as much cover as possible. Harold took up his position on the side where, judging from the sound of the approaching enemy, the attack would be delivered. Arthur was in command at the back of the square, while Ginger Venn's duty was to act as a foot "galloper" between the two midshipmen. Mounk Koon was not given any command, but the slight did not appear to cause him the least annoyance. Smiling in his usual genial manner, he busied himself in looking after the frightened people in the middle of the square, which Arthur, who had a very poor opinion of Mounk Koon's pluck, declared to be a very safe job.

For five long, anxious minutes after taking up its position the little army waited for the foe to appear. Then from out of the jungle, straight in front of Harold, rushed

a huge mob of wild-looking, almost naked, men, filling the air with their demoniacal shouts and brandishing the most varied collection of arms that any army ever had. *Dahs*, spears, axes, spades, long iron hooks for dragging floating timber from the river, wooden clubs and bars of iron were some of the things with which they had come to do battle. Not one of them had a musket of any description, but, in that respect, the defenders were no better off than the attackers. It was to be a hand-to-hand fight, and Harold saw at a glance that it would be a desperate one, for the attackers—brainless animals as they were—had sturdy frames, and were apparently devoid of fear. They would die like brute beasts if the battle went against them, but if they triumphed, the most fearful horrors that ever followed in the train of war would be enacted,

“Ginger Venn,” Harold said, “tell Mr. Drayton to come and support us with his men. We need not fear any strategy from the enemy.”

“Very good, sir,” Ginger Venn answered, and ran across the square to deliver the message, which Arthur was delighted to receive, for he had feared that Harold might beat off the attackers without his services being required.

So Arthur marched his men round to the front, and formed them up as a reserve just as the slaves, in one close mass, and leaderless, flung themselves ferociously upon the front rank, and fought their way through like demons. For a moment or two Harold’s force, surprised at the boldness and success of the enemy’s charge, was on the verge

of seeking safety in flight, but Arthur, at the head of his reserves, moved forward and fell upon the attackers, thereby giving confidence to the timid and inciting them to stand and fight. In a very few moments all semblance of order was lost, the slaves and the defenders of the village being mingled in one seething, shouting mass of blood-roused men.

"Come, Bah Pay," Harold said, "my army is as much beyond my control as the clouds are, so let us join in the scrimmage."

"My lord, I will die with you," Bah Pay answered, and together they ran down from their place of observation, and, slashing right and left among the slaves, cut their way through to the rescue of Ginger Venn, who, although already wounded in the shoulder, was keeping at bay four of the most desperate-looking scoundrels that they had ever seen.

"Thank you, sir; thank you, Bah Pay," Ginger Venn said, with a jovial smile, as the four slaves, three of them wounded by the new arrivals, moved off quickly to another part of the fight. "It was a near shave for me, but, as I'm still alive, I'll just pay the fellow out that wounded me."

Ginger Venn had kept a watch on the man, and, rushing after him, carried out his threat with promptness and dexterity.

In another part of the field, Arthur, slightly wounded in the thigh, was fighting with great success, his determin-

ation and his skill with the *dah* surprising both the enemy and his own party. The latter were more than surprised—they were delighted, and, cheered by his example, fought with courage such as they would never have shown had the head-man of the village, or MOUNG KOON, been commanding them.

Two or three times the slaves made a desperate effort to get away from the defenders and run amok among the women and children. On the first occasion, they succeeded in killing one child, but their other attempts were frustrated by Harold collecting a number of men and telling them off, with Bah Pay in command, to protect them. And so it came about that every man who broke away from the fighting to wreak his vengeance on women and children met with a speedy and well-deserved death.

The fight had now lasted for nearly a quarter of an hour, and had there been an onlooker, he would have seen that there were signs of its ending, before long, in a victory for the party commanded by Englishmen. But MOUNG KOON's men, now diminished greatly in numbers, were growing dispirited, and began to ask each other why they should risk their lives in defending the women and children of other men.

"Let their own men defend them," they murmured, and very soon convinced themselves that they were engaged in a quarrel which did not concern them in the least. Having arrived at that conclusion, they decided quickly to withdraw from the battle—to desert. With one



Two or three times the slaves made a desperate effort to get away from the defenders and run amok among the women and children.

accord some thirty of them, all uninjured, rushed out of the *mélée*, and scampered off towards the jungle, amidst the execrations of the villagers. The Englishmen, and the small force which remained with them, were now in a desperate strait. Annihilation seemed certain, but still they fought valiantly, hoping that death, if death awaited them, would come speedily and prevent them from falling alive into the hands of the inhuman foe. Nothing could have saved them from complete destruction had the slaves been led by a man able to keep them in hand and direct their action. But, as already stated, they had no leader, and every man fought just as it seemed best to him, or as necessity prompted. A flying foe is, however, in nine cases out of ten, harmless, compared with an enemy who stands and fights, and the sight of Moungh Koon's cowardly rascals hurrying into the jungle prompted nearly the whole of the hereditary slaves to start in hot pursuit. More of them would, no doubt, have joined in the chase had they not been engaged in desperate hand-to-hand encounters with the Englishmen and their comrades-in-arms. It would have been better for them if they had followed their fellow-slaves, for they were cut down quickly, and soon all who remained alive—some six in number—were prisoners.

The old men, the women and children, now swarmed out of their quarters, and surrounding the Englishmen and Bah Pay, showed their delight at the result of the battle by showering compliments on them and pressing

them to accept, as tokens of their gratitude, gold bracelets, anklets and rings.

"No, no," Harold laughed. "Tell them, Bah Pay, that it's very good of them indeed to offer such valuables, but we can't accept them. If they'll give us some fruit, we shall be delighted."

When the women heard the Englishmen's desire they scampered off to their huts, and returned, in a very few minutes, with some of the freshest and most luscious fruit that the country produced. Tired, wounded and reeking with perspiration as the three Englishmen were, the fruit was, indeed, a precious gift. It gave them fresh life, and with their newborn energy came the recollection of their wounds, which, although not very serious or particularly painful, were bleeding steadily.

"Come," Harold said, rising to his feet, "let us attend to each other's wounds."

This, however, was not such an easy thing to do as it sounded, and the Burmese women, seeing the difficult task the Englishmen had undertaken, modestly volunteered to assist. Their services were accepted without a moment's hesitation, and the kindly little women worked so intelligently and sympathetically that they were never forgotten by Arthur, Harold and Ginger Venn.

While the Englishmen's wounds were being dressed, other women were attending to their wounded fellow-villagers and the men of Mounng Koon's force who remained alive. Mounng Koon himself was only bruised,

but he knew, very well, that, had it not been for timely assistance rendered by Ginger Venn, he would have been dead. It made him shudder to think of his narrow escape. It was just after the majority of his men had deserted that the exciting incident occurred. He was standing shouting "Hi! hi! come back, or I'll cut your feet and hands off," when one of the hereditary slaves rushed at him and sent him flat on his back. In a moment the slave was kneeling on his chest, but in his excitement he dropped his knife, and before he could snatch it up, some one, rushing by, accidentally kicked it out of his reach. He used his fists, however, and with such force were his blows delivered, that Mounk Koon screamed, in terror, "Get away, get away, or I'll cut your head off." Naturally, the slave was not intimidated by that threat, which, however, reached the ears of Ginger Venn, who had just emerged, triumphantly, from a fierce combat with two slaves. He looked at once in the direction from which the shout came, and, spying Mounk Koon's plight, ran to the Burman's aid, and with one stroke of his *dah* freed him from his enemy.

After that incident, Mounk Koon was more convinced than ever that Ginger Venn was a great war chief, and he imparted this belief to the village folk as a fact, and they accepted the information as unimpeachable. So, when every man's wounds had been attended to, the village men advanced and prostrated themselves before Ginger Venn, as a mark of their admiration and respect. Ginger Venn

looked at them with marked suspicion for a moment or two, and then, turning to Bah Pay, asked sharply, "What's up now?"

"They have come, Ginger Venn," Bah Pay answered, "to pay homage to you, believing you to be a great general."

"Then they're a set of wooden-headed donkeys," Ginger Venn declared, angrily. "Tell them so."

"No, no," Harold joined in, "don't be rude to them. What harm can it do you to be thought a general?"

"What harm? Well, sir, I'm about tired of being somebody else, and that's a fact. I want to be myself now."

"Well, as soon as we get away from MOUNG KOON's gang you shall, but do oblige us, there's a good fellow, by pretending to be whatever these people say you are. It will smooth matters for us, because you see they don't think much of Mr. Drayton or me, and, if it wasn't for you, they'd consider us a very ordinary lot."

"If it's for the good of the lot of us, sir, why, of course, I'll put up with it. But for goodness' sake, sir, do let us make a start quickly. It makes me think I'm a heathen god again, to see everybody bowing and scraping to me."

"We'll start as soon as ever MOUNG KOON is ready. I'm going to speak to him now."

"MOUNG KOON," Harold said, as he and Bah Pay approached the Burman, "we have kept our promise, and fought side by side with you until the hereditary

slaves were defeated. Now we will become your prisoners again."

Moung Koon, who was just recovering from his fright, nodded his approval of their conduct, but the villagers heard the interpretation of Harold's speech in amazement.

"The white *kalas* shall not be prisoners of Moung Koon," one of them said to his neighbours. "It is foolishness to think that it is possible. The great war chief with-hair-on-one-side-of-his-face-and-whiskers-on-the-other could kill Moung Koon and all his men without any help."

"It is true. It is quite true," the people murmured, and Moung Koon began to look exceedingly nervous.

"But," he exclaimed, "the white *kalas* promised me that when the fight was finished they would become my prisoners again. They have done as they said they would, and now we will depart."

He rose hurriedly from his squatting position and called to his men, "Hi! hi! Keep watch over the white *kalas*, and make ready to continue our journey."

But not one of his men moved.

"Dogs!" he shouted, working himself into a terrible passion, "did you not hear my words? Take the *dahs* from the white *kalas* at once, or I'll cut off your ears."

Then one of his men uprose and addressed him in a loud voice, so that all could hear—

"How can we take the *dahs* from the white *kalas*?" he asked. "We are but seven men, and as we have seen the

white *kalas* fight, we know that it would be impossible to take from them their *dahs*. If we had twenty men we could do it."

Moung Koon turned immediately to the villagers and begged them to assist him in his difficulty, but they answered, emphatically, that the white *kalas* had proved that they were their friends, and therefore they would never consent to harm or displease them.

"We will help them to fight you," one youth declared, defiantly, and men, women and children shouted their approval of his words.

Harold now enquired what the excitement was about, and when Bah Pay had explained the situation, he looked very serious. But Arthur was in high spirits. "We're free," he exclaimed, "for those seven fellows won't try to stop us now that we are armed. Come on, let's be off."

"Gently, Arthur," Harold answered. "This is a matter that requires calm consideration. It is my opinion that we ought to surrender our *dahs* to Moung Koon."

"Surrender them!" Arthur exclaimed in amazement. "Oh, nonsense, you are talking bosh."

"I don't think so. We promised Moung Koon, that when the hereditary slaves were defeated, we would become his prisoners again—that we would, in fact, return to the state in which we were then. We were without weapons at that time, and I think that Moung Koon never doubted but that, when the fighting was over, we would return those that he supplied us with."

"But you forget that we took the oath Mounk Koon read out, and that there was nothing whatever said in it about giving up our arms."

"That was because he took it for granted we would do so."

"He shouldn't have done that. A man who doesn't look after his own interests deserves to be cheated."

Harold shook his head, gravely.

"Even if that were true," he said, "it does not exonerate the man who cheats him."

"Well, it's no good arguing with you, I know, for you always get the better of me, but let us appeal to Ginger Venn and Bah Pay. I say, you fellows——"

But Arthur's speech came to an abrupt conclusion in consequence of a sudden and surprising movement on the part of the villagers. With one accord they sprang to their feet, and rushing at Mounk Koon and his seven men, seized them, and, in spite of their protestations, bound them hand and foot.

The Englishmen, puzzled to account for the action of the villagers, stood, grasping their *dahs*, prepared for any emergency. But they discovered, very soon, that there was no intention of treating them in the way that Mounk Koon's party had been treated. In fact, no sooner were the newly-made prisoners securely bound than the villagers swarmed round the Englishmen, smiling, gesticulating, and talking loudly. With them came Bah Pay, who had been investigating the reason of the villagers' sudden action.

"My lords," he exclaimed, gaily, "we are free! The villagers have made MOUNG KOON and his men prisoners, and will not release them until seven days have passed. In that time we shall be very many miles away."

"Hurrah!" Arthur shouted, "that is a bit of good news."

"But why have they made MOUNG KOON and his men prisoners?" Harold enquired.

"My lord," Bah Pay answered, "they have done it so that we may know that we are free. They heard of the promise that you made to MOUNG KOON—that when the fighting was at an end you would become prisoners again—and now they say that it is not just that you, who have saved them from death, should be prisoners. They have commanded me to tell you that you can depart whenever you like."

"Harold!" Arthur exclaimed, anxiously, "you won't let this opportunity pass, will you?"

"Certainly not," Harold answered, "for the action of these good-hearted villagers amounts to a rescue."

"Well, as that's the case, I'm jolly glad that you didn't take my advice just now."

Harold smiled, and turning again to Bah Pay desired him to express to the villagers their heartfelt thanks for their kindness in setting them free.

This Bah Pay did, and the high praise bestowed upon them for returning good for good not only pleased them greatly, but incited them to further actions.

"To where are the white *kalas* travelling?" the head-man enquired, and Bah Pay answered, promptly—

"To the Irrawaddy."

"It is many miles. Do the white *kalas* want a guide?"

"My lord, they do."

The head-man gazed around at his people until his eyes rested on one man, whom he beckoned to come forward.

"This man," he said to Bah Pay, "will guide the white *kalas* to the great river."

Bah Pay thanked him, and was about to tell the Englishmen what he had said, when the head-man's wife addressed her husband.

"The white *kalas* are tired," she said, "and their feet are sore with much travelling in the jungle. It is a long journey to the great river, and it is foolishness for them to attempt to walk it. Let them be carried. We have many doolies and bearers in the village, and it is only just that we should lend some of them to the white *kalas*."

"Light of my eyes and joy of my life, the words you have spoken are full of wisdom. The white *kalas* shall not walk, but shall ride in doolies."

Almost before Bah Pay had told the Englishmen of this new piece of good fortune, three doolies, superior in every respect to the one in which Ginger Venn had entered the village, were brought out and offered to the Englishmen, who accepted them with gratitude.

"But where are the bearers?" Ginger Venn exclaimed

"It isn't much good giving a cove a cart if he hasn't got a horse."

"There they are," Bah Pay answered, pointing to two dozen almost naked fellows who were advancing, somewhat timidly, towards them, "and if I may judge from their limbs they will carry you very quickly."

"Why do you say 'you,' and not 'us'?" Harold enquired, and at the same moment guessed the reason—there were only three doolies. "Point out to the head-man that there are four of us," Harold suggested, but Bah Pay did not see fit to do so.

"My lord, the villagers wish to show honour to the white *kalas*," he explained, "and therefore they have given three doolies and twenty-four bearers. But I am not a white *kala*, and my countrymen think that I am accustomed to travelling through the jungle."

"You must undeceive them then. Tell the head-man that we shall be glad if he will give, or lend, us one more dooly."

"My lord, it would not be wise to do so. The head-man would think that I was presumptuous. He would say, 'Bah Pay thinks that because he travels with white *kalas* he is himself white.' My lord, I will walk."

"Bah Pay, you won't," Ginger Venn joined in. "We'll take it in turns to ride. Too much luxury ain't good for a fellow, and I don't want to get too fat."

"I'll arrange who is to ride and who is to walk," Harold declared, "so don't let us waste any more time. Bah Pay

will be the first to take his turn at walking, for the reason he mentioned. You, Ginger Venn, get into the gilded dooly. It was specially provided for you."

Ginger Venn hesitated, for, although he knew that the Burmese believed him to be a person of high rank, he did not like the idea of riding in such a gorgeous dooly while Arthur and Harold rode in ordinary ones. He was about to protest, but Harold, who now that he was accustomed to being in authority insisted on being obeyed, commanded him to take his seat without a word. He did so, and a minute later the three Englishmen were carried out of the village accompanied, for a short distance, by a crowd of men, women and children wishing them a speedy and safe journey.

"Who would think," Arthur said to Harold and Ginger Venn, when they had left the villagers behind, "that those good-natured little people were our enemies, and that it was their countrymen we fought at Rangoon?"

"It proves," Harold answered, "that there are people of different temperaments in all countries. Our little friends from whom we have just parted were the essence of kindness and hospitality, and yet we know that, in other parts of this land, the natives have murdered our countrymen in cold blood. We must be very cautious, and not expect all the Burmese to be like those we have just left. The next ones we meet may be some of the torturing, murdering type."

That was not a cheering thought, but, nevertheless, it

failed to disturb the Englishmen, who were enjoying a spell of unalloyed enjoyment. After trudging, footsore, along jungle paths for so long, it was, indeed, a grand luxury to be able to lie still, knowing all the while that every minute they were getting nearer to the Irrawaddy.

CHAPTER XII

HOW THE HEAD-MAN FIRED A RIFLE

THE Englishmen's period of luxurious rest was not of long duration, for, about an hour after quitting the village, the guide, who was walking at the head of the procession, suddenly held up his hand, as a warning to them to halt. Then, hurrying back to the Englishmen, he exclaimed, excitedly, "My lords, there is a man in the jungle calling to us for help. Shall we go to him?"

"Certainly," Harold answered, but then, remembering that most of their misfortunes had been brought on them through lack of caution, added, "That is, Bah Pay, if you think it is not an attempt to trap us."

"My lord," Bah Pay answered, "it may be, and it may not be. Who can tell?"

That reply being about as useless a one as could have been uttered, Harold said, sharply, "Then we must send a few men to find out."

"I'll go," Arthur volunteered, at once.

"And so will I, sir," Ginger Venn joined in.

"I can't spare both of you," Harold answered. "You

go, Arthur. Take the guide and six of the bearers, and mind you sing out loudly if you find it is a trap."

"Aye, aye!" Arthur replied, well pleased at the prospect of some new adventure, and a minute later started off, walking, when possible, side by side with the guide, in the direction from which the appeal for help came.

Quickly, but cautiously, they made their way through the tangled undergrowth until they were quite close to the man, who now was shouting in tones of wild despair. Pushing aside the leaves of a sturdy plant, they peered out on a small clearing and saw, sitting in the centre of it, a Burman, badly wounded in the leg. The stained ground around him showed only too plainly that he had lost a great quantity of blood, and it was evident, too, that the rough bandage tied over the wound only partially stopped the bleeding.

"Poor fellow!" Arthur exclaimed, and, discarding caution, dashed aside the jungle plants and ran to the wounded man's assistance. As he reached him he saw a frightened look of recognition in his eyes, and, wondering when and where they had met before, he looked hard at him and knew. The wounded man was one of the party of Moun^g Koon's men who had deserted in the middle of the fight.

"Mercy!" the poor terrified wretch gasped, and swooned.

In a moment Arthur was down on his knees beside him, gently removing the bandage preparatory to making it

more effective. When he had done this he looked round to speak to the guide, and, to his astonishment, saw that individual standing, some yards away, glaring at him in a most savage fashion. And near him stood his six companions, all looking equally displeased.

"Fetch some water," Arthur commanded, but neither the guide nor any of his men moved a muscle.

"You scoundrels!" he shouted, "fetch some water."

"My lord," the guide answered, in an aggrieved tone, "why do you not let the vile dog die? He is not fit to live, for he left women and children to be killed. We will not fetch any water for him."

Arthur did not attempt to argue with him, but shouted loudly for Harold, with the result that Harold, Ginger Venn and Bah Pay, accompanied by a dozen of the bearers, arrived in a couple of minutes, expecting to find Arthur in conflict with some enemy. Their astonishment was great, therefore, when they saw how he was employed; but, before they had time to ask any questions, he called to them, "Bring some water quickly. Those rascals won't, because this fellow is one of Moungh Koon's men who skedaddled."

"Who says they won't fetch it?" Ginger Venn exclaimed, and, promptly seizing the guide by the neck and the seat of his skirt, ran him quickly away towards the men in charge of the skins of water. In five minutes the guide returned, completely subdued, carrying a small jar. Ginger Venn walked behind with a smile of contentment on his

peculiarly decorated face, while the bearers, fearing his wrath, tried to hide themselves behind each other.

A sprinkling of water from the jar soon brought the wounded man to consciousness, but he showed no signs of gratitude for the attention paid him, believing that the Englishmen were anxious only that he should live so that they might torture him. Bah Pay, guessing that he had some such thought, assured him that white *kalas* never did such things, and that the three white lords whom he had the honour to serve were the kindest men in the world. Even this high praise did not reassure the wounded man, as it appeared only natural to him that Bah Pay should speak as he had. He would have done the same, he said to himself, had he been paid to do so. His surliness and distrust did not, however, affect Arthur or Harold in the least. They saw that he was well fed, and afterwards superintended the bathing and bandaging of his wounds.

"The poor wretch will have to be carried in one of the doolies," Harold said, "he is much too weak to walk."

"Hurrah!" Ginger Venn cried. "Now I shall be able to walk like a Christian, instead of being carried about like a guy on the fifth of November. But the fellow shan't ride in my dooly. One of you young gentlemen must do that and let him ride in yours."

"Bosh!" Arthur answered; "I shall walk. I'm the youngest. You keep to your gorgeous dooly, and I'll make over mine to this wounded fellow."

Ginger Venn would not, however, give way.

"I shall walk, whether you do or do not," he declared, "and then there'll be a dooly vacant. Come, sir, do oblige me, for if I don't get some walking, I shall soon be as fat as a prize pig."

"But I don't want to get fat any more than you. I know that I shall be a beastly fat little man when I get middle-aged because I'm just the build, but I don't intend to be fat while I'm young. At your age, Ginger Venn, it doesn't matter if a fellow is fat. You're past the romantic age, and——"

"Oh, stash it, Arthur," Harold interrupted, "and let's get on. You're to ride, and Ginger Venn is to walk."

That decision was highly displeasing to Arthur, but he did not dream of grumbling, for was not Harold his superior officer? He turned away, silently, and assisted Bah Pay in lifting the wounded man into the dooly which, at Harold's command, had been fetched for his use. But, as it turned out, he did have a considerable amount of walking after all, for, when the little force had been got into order and resumed its march, Harold began to question the deserter as to what happened after they had fled into the jungle.

"Did the hereditary slaves overtake you?" he asked, through the medium of Bah Pay.

"My lord, they did," the man answered, "and then we fought them. We killed very many of them, and they killed very many of us. When I was wounded I ran away, so that I do not know who won the fight. But in

a few minutes we shall arrive at the place where we fought, and then it will be seen which side killed the greater number of men."

Scarcely had the deserter finished speaking when the party began to discern signs of the fight which had taken place, when Mounk Koon's men turned on their pursuers. Here and there was a broken spear, a torn garment, and a blood-stained *dah*. Soon they came accross the slain. At first they were lying singly, a little further on in twos and threes, and finally, scattered thickly over the ground, were some forty of them—hereditary slaves and Mounk Koon's men mingled together in their last sleep.

"It looks as if the slaves got the best of the fight," Ginger Venn said, after a glance round at the corpses, "for there are far more of Mounk Koon's fellows here than slaves."

"So there are," Harold agreed, "and it is a very good thing for us that the slaves did win. If Mounk Koon's fellows had driven the slaves back with little loss to themselves, they would have hurried and got reinforcements to capture us. The slaves, I fancy, won't trouble about us, unless it be to keep out of our way. But we must not stand here talking. Some of these poor fellows may be still alive. Let us see."

But although Arthur, Harold and Ginger Venn searched diligently for some signs of life among the bodies strewn around, they did not succeed in finding any. Every man was dead, and, judging from his wounds, had died speedily.

"Some of the wounded ones must be near at hand," Harold declared, "for all that were wounded could not have died so quickly."

"Let's extend our search then," Arthur suggested, and a thorough examination of the jungle for some distance around the scene of the fight was made, but without discovering even one person alive.

"Well," Harold said, when they gave up the search, "all we can do now is to keep a sharp look-out to guard against a surprise. The Oriental must never be judged from a European standpoint, and it is quite possible that, by this time, Moung Koon's men have made peace with the hereditary slaves, so that they may combine their forces and recapture us."

"But they are not aware that we have left the village," Arthur remarked. "For all they know we might be dead."

"They will soon discover that we are alive. If they have joined forces, the first thing they will do will be to march back to that village."

"And murder the poor little people. Let's go back, Harold, and defend them again."

"I don't think that there is any need for us to do that, for when the rascals find that we have quitted the village they'll start in pursuit. They won't waste time in injuring the villagers, you may be sure, when they know that there is a chance of capturing us and earning the Queen's reward. As I said before, we must keep a sharp look-out."

They did so, but for three days nothing whatever

occurred to cause them the slightest uneasiness. Their guide took them by a very unfrequented, and, consequently, almost obliterated path, which had safety only to recommend it. Of course, that was the most important thing required, but Arthur would have preferred a little more danger and much less monotony.

However, he was not the only one of the party who was delighted when, on the third day, the guide announced that they were approaching a small village.

"My lords," the guide said, "I know the head-man, and when I tell him how you defended my village against the hereditary slaves, he will treat you as well as if you were his brothers."

The guide did not exaggerate, for the head-man, after a few words conversation with him, welcomed the Englishmen in a very hearty fashion. He knew nothing of the fighting at Rangoon, and, consequently, there was no check to his hospitality. The best of everything that the village contained, in the way of food, was offered them, and a good stock of the least perishable things was packed up for their sustenance on the next stage of their journey.

"Will not the white lords remain in my village until daybreak?" the head-man enquired, but Bah Pay was instructed to reply that, although the English lords were unable to accept the invitation, they appreciated highly the head-man's courtesy. Bah Pay translated that into the most flowery Burmese, and delivered a speech bristling with compliments and well-turned expressions

of gratitude. The head-man was highly pleased, and decided, on the spot, to do something that would add to the *kalas'* good opinion of him.

"The white lords have no guns," he said to Bah Pay ;
"ask them if they would like one."

Being entirely without fire-arms, a gun was just the thing that the Englishmen desired, and Bah Pay was, therefore, instructed to say that they would very much like to possess one.

"I wonder what it will be," Arthur said to Harold and Ginger Venn. "A species of blunderbuss, I expect."

"At any rate," Harold replied, "a blunderbuss will be better than nothing at all, and we must take care not to appear disappointed if it turns out to be as useless as a pea-shooter."

The head-man, who had gone to his hut, returned in a few minutes with a long box, which he carried very gingerly.

"Evidently," Arthur remarked, "the old fellow is frightened that if he shakes it there'll be an explosion."

"Be quiet," Harold commanded, "or the head-man will see that you are making fun of him."

"All right, I'll be as serious as—as you."

The head-man now placed the box on the ground, and removed the lid with great care. Then he exclaimed, "Let the white lords approach and take the gun that I have given them."

As soon as his command was translated to them, Arthur, Harold and Ginger Venn advanced to receive the

present, and a thrill of delight passed through them all when they found that instead of the gun being, as they expected, an antiquated and unreliable thing, it was a modern rifle in excellent condition.

"This is a piece of luck," Harold murmured, as he and Arthur examined it.

"I should just think it was," Arthur agreed. "It's a Dêlvigne."

"By Jove! so it is."

This discovery added to their delight, for the Dêlvigne rifle, used in the French army, was as good a weapon as any in existence.

Harold immediately thanked the head-man for his generosity, and was preparing to retire with the rifle, when the donor suggested that he should show him how it was fired. Thinking that it might be considered discourteous to reply that there was no need for him to receive instruction in such matters, Harold acquiesced, and returned the rifle to the head-man.

It soon became evident that the head-man's idea of firing a rifle was to have it done by his servants, two of whom came and stood in front of him, with their backs towards him. Then he handed the rifle to the man on the left, who loaded it and passed it on to the man beside him. The latter was to fire it. He raised it to his shoulder, with the muzzle pointed to the sky, and waited for the command to fire.

"He's using the sun for a target," Arthur whispered,



“Let the white lords approach and take the gun that I have given them.”—*P.* 199.

whereupon Harold promptly kicked his foot as a reminder not to talk.

"Shoot," the head-man commanded, and the servant pressed the trigger.

The villagers applauded loudly as the smoke floated away, and the Englishmen did their best to appear equally pleased with the performance. Harold, however, was afraid that Arthur and Ginger Venn's enthusiastic applause—in which they indulged to prevent themselves from bursting into laughter—might arouse suspicion, so he hastened to engage the head-man in conversation.

"It is an excellent rifle," he remarked, after the rifle and ammunition had been presented to him, "and every time that I and my countrymen fire it we will remember you and give thanks to you. Now we must depart."

As Harold finished speaking he shook hands heartily with the head-man, and Arthur and Ginger Venn did likewise. Bah Pay was about to follow their example, but the head-man withheld his hand, and intimated to him, in a friendly tone, that as he was a Burman, the Burmese form of salutation was the proper one for him to indulge in. So Bah Pay bowed low, and every other Burman attached to the Englishmen's party having made a similar sign of respectful farewell, Harold gave the word for the march to be resumed.

CHAPTER XIII

ARTHUR SHOOTS A TIGER

THE head-man's generosity in presenting them with a rifle was, for the next half-hour, almost the sole subject of conversation among the three Englishmen and Bah Pay.

"You must take charge of it, Arthur," Harold said, "for you are a much better shot than I am."

"But how about Ginger Venn?" Arthur enquired. "Perhaps he's a crack shot."

"With a catapult I'd back myself against most coves, sir," Ginger Venn said, "but as for fire-arms, well, until we met those slaves, I was always a man of peace and never had any call to use such things."

"Then it's time you learnt to handle a rifle. Every Englishman ought to be a decent shot, no matter what his profession or trade is."

"I've no doubt you're quite right, sir, and I'll learn to shoot when I get a chance. But for me to practise shooting with that there rifle would be a spoiling of a good weapon and a waste of ammunition."

"That's perfectly true," Harold joined in, "and, moreover, it would be folly for any of us to fire, unless it were absolutely necessary, for the report of the rifle might be heard by some of the natives, who would, possibly, prove less friendly than the people we have just left."

"My lords," Bah Pay said, seriously, "it is quite right that, now, we should be more cautious than ever, for it is certain that we shall not again meet any of my countrymen who have not heard of the capture of the Shway Dagon Pagoda. Every man we meet will be our enemy."

"Then the rifle will be very handy," Arthur exclaimed, eyeing it lovingly.

-- "My lord, it will if you have it when it is wanted."

"What do you mean?" Arthur asked, sharply.

"My lord, to steal a rifle is not considered a great sin by my countrymen. If it were I am afraid that they would still steal them. My lord, I do not speak more than is true, and therefore I advise you to trust your rifle to no man but your honourable friends and me."

"Thanks for your warning. I'll guard this rifle as carefully as if it were a despatch I was carrying."

And he did. Awake, he never for a moment let it go out of his sight, and when he lay down to sleep he took the precaution of tying the butt to his arm. Once Ginger Venu, to test the value of that proceeding, attempted to untie the rifle without arousing the sleeper, but Arthur was awake in a moment, and had grasped the purloiner's arm tightly before he discovered who he was. As the

days passed by, Arthur's vigilance did not decrease in the slightest, but, although he never mentioned it, he began to feel rather disappointed that no opportunity for testing the rifle had presented itself. But the opportunity came when the rifle had been in his possession four days. Arthur, Harold, Ginger Venn and Bah Pay were seated in a circle enjoying a hastily-cooked meal, and discussing the prospects of their reaching the Irrawaddy in safety, when they were startled by the loud piercing cry of a dog in pain.

"It's Prince," Ginger Venn exclaimed, in alarm, and, jumping up, rushed off to see what had happened to his faithful friend. Harold and Bah Pay followed him immediately, but, for once in a way, Arthur lagged behind. He did so with a purpose, convinced that the much-desired opportunity for testing the rifle had come. Taking a cartridge from his pocket he bit off the paper at the top of it, poured the powder down the muzzle and rammed the bullet home on top of it. That done, he hurried after his friends, and overtook them at a critical moment. Ginger Venn had arrived on the spot too late; his faithful dog Prince was already dead—killed by a tiger. And at Ginger Venn's intrusion the monarch of the jungle, standing with one paw pressed firmly on the lifeless dog, glared at him and lashed his tail in fury. Maddened by grief at the loss of his faithful companion, Ginger Venn rushed at the tiger and dealt him a tremendous cut with his *dah*. The suddenness of the attack surprised the tiger,

but with an unearthly yell of pain he sprang on Ginger Venn and bore him to the ground.

It was at that moment that Arthur arrived, and, seeing his friend's plight, his rifle went up to his shoulder instantly. There was no excitement whatever about Arthur now, and Harold was surprised to see how calmly his chum took aim. But would he succeed in saving Ginger Venn was what Harold thought of mostly, for the rifle was new to Arthur, and it was some months since he had had any practice at shooting. The next moment his anxiety was at end. Arthur fired, and almost simultaneously with the report, the tiger uttered a yell of mingled rage and pain and made an effort to spring towards its new assailant, only, however, to roll over—dead.

"Well done, Arthur!" Harold shouted, "it was splendid." And at the same moment—before his countrymen could get to him—Ginger Venn scrambled to his feet. His left arm was lacerated badly, but that did not seem to trouble him much.

"Thank you, sir," he said to Arthur, and then turned to his friend Prince, half hoping that there might still be life in him. But, alas, the poor pariah dog, that he had taken in hand and made a good, intelligent and faithful friend, would never again respond to his call, or delight the little Burmese children with his tricks.

"He must be buried decently," Ginger Venn said, in a husky voice, making no attempt to conceal the tears which glistened in his eyes and trickled down his cheeks.

"Certainly," Harold answered, "but first we must see to your arm."

Ginger Venn was too depressed to offer any objection, so Arthur, Harold and Bah Pay set to work and bound up the wound very skilfully indeed.

"The blood made it look worse than it is," Harold told him, in the hope of cheering him up, but all he answered was, "Let us bury Prince now."

"We'll do that," Arthur assured him. "You look on and tell us how you want it done."

"No, no, he was my dog, and I shall bury him," Ginger Venn answered, jealously, but soon found that, with his wounded arm, he was practically incapable of doing all that he would have liked to do. So Arthur and Harold dug the grave, Ginger Venn having to content himself with putting the dead body into it.

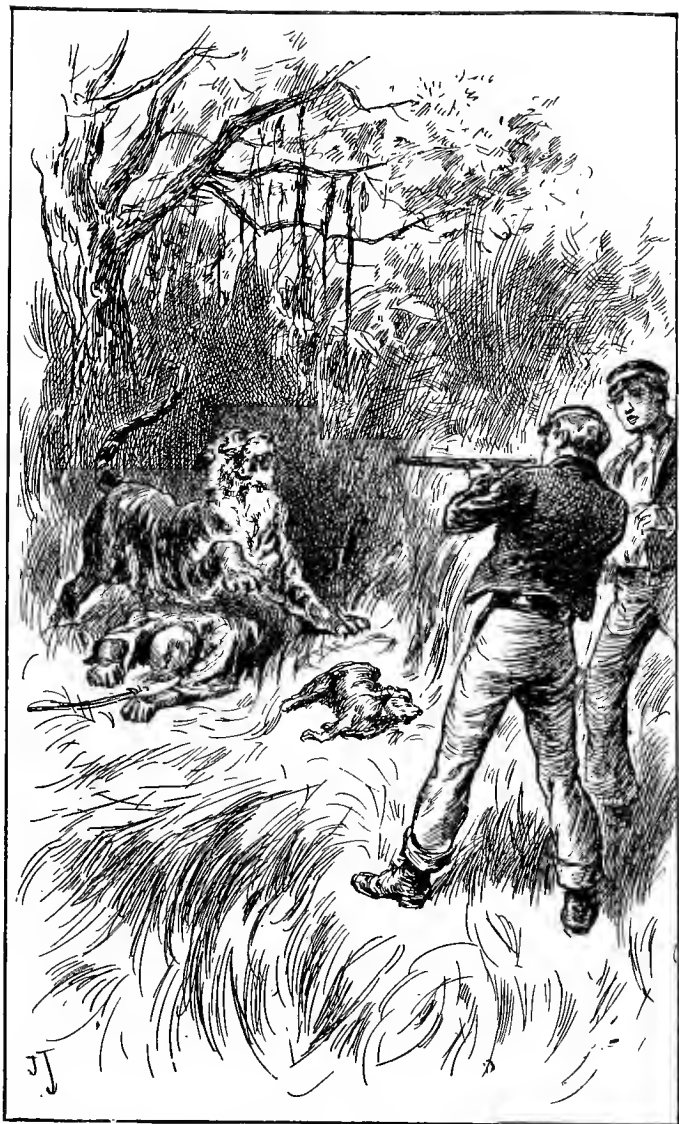
"Now I must have some writing over it," he said, when the grave was filled in. "Can't one of you young gentlemen compose something?"

"The difficulty is to find something to write on," Arthur replied, looking around.

"Why not use stones?" Harold asked.

"We shall have to, I suppose. Let's hunt for some."

They did so, and with some difficulty procured sufficient for the purpose required. Then, after consulting Ginger Venn, Arthur, Harold and Bah Pay set to work and inscribed on the grave, in letters made of stones—



Arthur fired . . . the tiger uttered a yell of mingled rage and pain and made an effort to spring forward.—P. 207.

HERE LIES
PRINCE
THE FAITHFUL FRIEND
OF
GINGER VENN.

For a time Ginger Venn stood looking at it in silence. To the Burmans his grief for his dog was an extraordinary thing, which they regarded as akin to insanity, but to Arthur and Harold it was very natural. Nevertheless, they did not consider it wise to allow Ginger Venn to remain for long a prey to gloomy thoughts. They reminded him that the longer they delayed their march the lesser grew their chances of escaping from the country.

"All right, young gentlemen," Ginger Venn answered, "I'm coming now. Good-bye, Prince, I shall never have another dog that will be such a real friend to me as you were."

After one last look at Prince's grave, Ginger Venn quietly followed Arthur and Harold towards where the doolies had been left. Bah Pay was the last to quit the spot, for he expected that the Englishmen would desire to possess the tiger's skin, and would return when they had escorted Ginger Venn in safety to the dooly in which Harold insisted that he should ride. But, noticing that he was not with them, Harold turned

round, and seeing him waiting, called to him, "Why are you stopping there?"

"My lord," he answered, "do you not wish to preserve the tiger's skin? I am guarding it till you return."

"Oh, never mind about that, we can't be bothered with any more luggage. Leave the carcass for the birds and vermin to devour."

"It is a pity," Bah Pay declared, and then, dismissing the subject from his thoughts, hurried after the Englishmen, coming up to them just as they arrived at the doolies, where the bearers were standing together talking excitedly.

"Something has happened," Harold said to Bah Pay. "Find out what it is."

Bah Pay had no difficulty in doing so, for almost before he addressed them, the eldest of the bearers volunteered the information that Mounk Koon's man, whom they had picked up in the jungle and treated so well, had escaped.

"But why did you let him escape?" Bah Pay asked, angrily.

"How could we prevent him from going? When we heard that the white *kalas* had killed a tiger we ran to the spot to peep at it, and when we returned the vile dog had gone."

Arthur laughed heartily when he heard the explanation. "Your countrymen appear to think that Mounk Koon's man did a very unsportsmanlike thing in bolting when

he had the chance. I think he did a very sensible thing."

"My lord, so do I, but then I have lived with English people for many years and think as they think. My countrymen, however, will believe, in spite of all we may say, that a man who would take advantage of his custodians, in the way that Moungh Koon's fellow did, must be a very mean scoundrel."

"And I agree with them that the fellow is a mean scoundrel, but for another reason," Harold declared. "We saved his life, treated him with the greatest kindness, and now he has bolted to try and bring about our capture. How do I know that, you think? Why, the very fact of his escaping proves it. He himself told us that he was a Prome man and was anxious to return to his native place. If he had remained with us he would have got there in time, for we shall pass Prome on our way down the river to Rangoon. He knew that, but the possibility of earning the Queen's reward was a greater attraction than the thought of returning to his native place. He'll find his way to the nearest village, and in a few hours a fresh band of men will be on our track."

"My lord, all that you say is quite true. We must push on rapidly and be prepared for an attack at any moment."

"The rifle is a first-class one," Arthur said, reflectively, "and the next time that any one attempts to arrest us it will be very useful. I will have it loaded in readiness."

But, contrary to the travellers' expectation, three days passed without any sign of the enemy. Nevertheless, they did not relax their vigilance in the slightest degree. Harold and Arthur never slept at the same time, and when the latter was resting the former carried the rifle.

On the third day Ginger Venn, whose arm was healing as quickly as could be expected in the circumstances, declared that he had had quite enough of dooly riding, and flatly refused to have any more of it. His spirits, which had been very low on the day succeeding Prince's death, were rising rapidly, for, now that they were drawing nearer to the river and freedom, all his eagerness to get back to London returned. He plied Arthur and Harold with questions as to how long it would take him to get back to London from Rangoon, and when they had given him all the information, he remembered suddenly that he had no money to pay his passage.

"Don't let that worry you," Arthur said, as soon as he heard the difficulty, "for Harold and I will see to that. We haven't a penny between us in our pockets, but when we get back to the *Fox* there'll be no trouble about getting that altered."

"When will you be going back to England, sir?"

"Can't say at all. Perhaps not for years. Perhaps I shall never get back. We never know what's in store for us."

The truth of Arthur's last remark was proved—although

such a commonplace needed no proof—by an event which occurred within the following hour.

They were trudging along in single file, as was usual when the path was narrow, when suddenly, in front of them, just where the path widened, a dozen shaven-headed, bare-footed, yellow-robed *phoongyees* stepped out of the jungle and barred their way. The Englishmen halted promptly, and every Burman, with the exception of Bah Pay, flung himself to the ground and remained there.

Arthur was at a loss what to do. He grasped his rifle tightly, but hesitated to show it threateningly, as the *phoongyees* had been described to him, times innumerable, as holy men who rarely preached, but always practised good deeds. Having renounced the world, they lived but to obey the commandments of Buddha, to teach the sons of their neighbours to read, to write and to commit to memory the holy precepts of Gautama. The religion of *kalas*, black or white, never caused them a moment's uneasiness, for they were tolerant to all, and scorned to attempt to make converts. Such men surely would not wish them any harm; and yet, why were they barring their way? And why, too, were *phoongyees* stepping silently out of the jungle on either side, and blocking up the path at the rear of them? It began to look ominous, although the *phoongyees* had threatened them neither by look nor word.

"What does it all mean?" Harold enquired of Bah Pay.

"My lord, I know not," was his answer.

"Then ask them what they want."

But before Bah Pay had time to do so, a decrepit *phoongyee*, so old and bent that the Englishmen felt a thrill of pity when they saw him, advanced a few steps and exclaimed, "Vile dogs! cursed *kalas*! you shall be punished at last. Have you not enough temples in your own country that you are jealous of our pagodas, and have come in great ships to destroy them? All that your countrymen have done to the great Shway Dagon Pagoda is known to me. You have driven my people from its holy heights, and——"

"Virtuous lord," Bah Pay interrupted, "the English *kalas* drove our countrymen from the Pagoda because they fired on them from it. The English *kalas* will do no harm to the glorious Pagoda, I am certain."

"Peace, presumptuous dog," the *phoongyee* shouted angrily, youth, or rather the strength of middle age, appearing to return to him. "You speak our language, your face is beautiful as ours, and you wear our dress, and yet you have a white man's heart. You deserve to be punished as well as the *kalas*. Seize them, my sons."

In a moment the crowd of meek-looking *phoongyees* became a mob of yelling, passion-stirred fanatics, and, springing upon the Englishmen, seized them. Although taken by surprise, Arthur, Harold and Ginger Venn quickly shook off the first men who seized them, and slashed around with their *dahs* in a way that laid many

a *phoongyee* low. Arthur's rifle although loaded had no percussion cap, and before he could put one on the nipple, the rifle was seized and a tug of war ensued, which, considering the overwhelming number of *phoongyees*, could end in one way only—a defeat for Arthur. The rifle was taken from him, and, in spite of his gallant efforts to recapture it, he never saw it again, for it was passed so rapidly from hand to hand that the prize was soon some distance from the actual conflict.

By this time Arthur, Harold and Ginger Venn were separated and fighting desperately, but without even one of the men who had accompanied them from the last village lending any assistance. They were still prostrate on the ground, although they had taken good care to crawl a few yards away, so as to minimise the chances of receiving an accidental wound.

Bah Pay was already a prisoner. He had fought in a very half-hearted manner, for, in spite of having been almost completely Europeanised, he still possessed a certain amount of affection for the *phoongyees*, whom, in his childhood's days, he had been taught to revere.

And so the three Englishmen were left to fight, unaided, some thirty or forty *phoongyees*, inflamed by what they believed to be a wrong done to their religion. The capture of the Shway Dagon Pagoda by the English was, in their opinion, a sacrilegious act, but they quite ignored the fact that their countrymen, by turning the temple into a formidable fort, had made its capture imperative. They

fought with fanatical frenzy to avenge the insult to their religion, and against their overwhelming numbers it was, of course, impossible for Arthur, Harold and Ginger Venn to battle for long. Each one expected death, and desired only that it might come speedily and save him from the possibility of weeks, or perhaps months, of torture at the hands of the enemy. But that desire was not gratified, for the *phoongyees*, finding that the Englishmen were fearless beyond any men they had ever seen, and were not to be intimidated by mere numbers, determined to do by stealth what they found that they could not do otherwise. To capture, and not to kill, the Englishmen was their desire, and, therefore, a number of the yellow-robed priests made no further use of the *dahs* with which they had armed themselves, but watched for an opportunity to seize the white men from behind. That opportunity soon arrived, for although Arthur, Harold and Ginger Venn endeavoured to fight standing, as near as possible, back to back, they found that in a hand-to-hand conflict it was impracticable. In their excitement they became separated, and in a moment two agile *phoongyees* rushed at Arthur and Harold, and, throwing their thin bare arms around them, held them tight. Others rushed to their aid, and, in a trifle longer time than it takes to relate, the midshipmen were disarmed, flung to the ground, and held there by a dozen or so of the fanatical priests.

Ginger Venn was not captured so easily. He saw the

phoongyees seize Arthur and Harold from behind, and guessing that a similar attack would be made on him, he raised his right foot and kicked out backwards with all the energy he could muster. It was timed beautifully. The *phoongyee* who was running to seize him received the kick in the middle of his stomach, doubling him up and causing him to howl with pain. But he was not in agony for long; Ginger Venn turned round sharply and followed up his cow-kick with a sweeping cut with his *dah*, which put the fellow out of his pain instantly. Ginger Venn was by this time completely surrounded, but he kept the enemy at bay for fully two minutes longer by turning rapidly first one way and then another, and accompanying each change of front with a vigorous cut at the man nearest to him. Of course that was exceptionally tiring work, and, suffering as Ginger Venn was from the effects of the tiger's mauling, it is a wonder that he managed to keep off the enemy even for half-a-minute. At last one of the *phoongyees* saw his opportunity, and, springing forward, threw his arms around Ginger Venn. Two men went down on their knees and grasped his feet, while a third caught hold of the hair on the Charles I. side of his head and pulled it viciously. But there was still some fight left in Ginger Venn, and he struggled so desperately to free himself from the enemy that when, at last, they dragged him to the ground they held him there, kneeling on his chest, legs, and outspread arms until his feet had been bound tightly together. Then they

proceeded to tie his arms to his side, and although they found it a very difficult and dangerous job—for, while his left arm was being tied, Ginger Venn landed a terrific blow, with his right fist, full in a *phoongyee's* eye—they succeeded in doing it.

Having assured themselves that the Englishmen were securely bound hand and foot, the *phoongyees* turned their attention to the dooly bearers, who had remained throughout the fight grovelling on the ground.

“Return to your village at once,” the old *phoongyee* said to them kindly, but firmly, “for men of Burma should not have any dealings with the white *kalas* who desecrate our pagodas. Go, my children.”

That was a very welcome order, and the dooly bearers proceeded to obey it by retreating backwards on hands and knees. It was not a graceful way of retiring, and a lot of confusion arose through the men in the front rank starting back before those in the rear of them were ready, and thereby thrusting their hard feet in their faces. Then when the rear rank reached the jungle and could proceed no further on all-fours, the front rank again backed on them, and imagining those behind were not hurrying enough, gave sundry sly kicks to waken them up.

Arthur shouted with laughter, and even the aged *phoongyee* appeared to consider the proceeding somewhat ridiculous, for, although he did not so far forget himself as to indulge in such an unpriestly thing as a laugh, there

was a merry twinkle in his eyes which could not be concealed.

“Rise and depart,” he commanded, and the bearers, jumping to their feet, took up their doolies and hastened away at a trot. But Bah Pay, naturally, remained with the Englishmen.

CHAPTER XIV

GUARDED BY CROCODILES

WHEN the aged *phoongyee* noticed that Bah Pay did not depart with the bearers, he said to him, with a look of mild surprise on his wrinkled face—

“Why have you not gone with the men of your village?”

“Virtuous lord,” Bah Pay answered, squatting down as a sign of respect, “the dooly bearers who have just departed were strangers to me until a few days ago. I am a Rangoon man.”

“Then why are you here? Why did you not die in defending the Shway Dagon Pagoda?”

“Virtuous lord, I am not a soldier.”

“That is a foolish answer. When a pagoda needs defending all men should be soldiers.”

Bah Pay made no reply, for he knew, very well, that it would be utterly impossible for him to clear himself in his countrymen's eyes. His sympathies had been with the English ever since hostilities began in the Rangoon river,

and he was exceedingly proud of that fact, although he was perfectly aware that his feelings were unpatriotic.

For a moment or two the *phoongyee* looked at him steadily, as if endeavouring to read his mind. Then he said, in a sudden burst of anger—

“Vile dog, it is useless to seek to deceive me. You have been helping these white *kalas* to escape.”

“Virtuous lord, the words that you say are true.”

“Why tell me that? Is it not known to all men for miles around, in jungle villages and on river boats, that all the words I utter are true?”

“Virtuous lord, I do not doubt it.”

“That is good. Now depart. It was a vile thing to do when you assisted the *kala* dogs to escape. Nevertheless, we will pardon you. Depart.”

“Virtuous lord,” Bah Pay answered, “if I depart, how will you speak to the white *kalas*? They do not understand our language, and I am sure that none of the virtuous lords can speak theirs.”

“You speak foolishly,” a younger *phoongyee* declared, stepping forward, “for I can speak English. Before I took the holy vows of priesthood I lived in Rangoon and was the servant of an English *kala*. And I know you. You are Bah Pay, the servant of the white man who tries to make our countrymen believe his religion. He has made you believe it, but you are only a foolish fellow.”

“Now I know why you quitted Rangoon,” the aged *phoongyee* joined in. “If you are no longer a good

Buddhist, but believe in the religion which the white priests teach, you no longer care what befalls our pagodas. You will, perhaps, help the white *kalas* to destroy them."

"Virtuous lord," Bah Pay answered, earnestly, "the white *kalas* have never destroyed, or tried to injure, our pagodas——"

A loud shout of derision from the crowd of priests cut short Bah Pay's protest. Even the aged *phoongyee* grew angry.

"Have they not captured the Shway Dagon Pagoda? You do not, now that you are not a Buddhist, even speak the truth, and therefore you shall become a prisoner."

The *phoongyee* then commanded his subordinates to bind Bah Pay, and, as he offered no resistance, the task was accomplished speedily. When it was done, the order to return to the *kyoung*, or monastery, was given, but could not be obeyed at once because of the Englishmen and Bah Pay having their feet tied. To release the bonds would be, the *phoongyees* considered with reason, a very risky proceeding, so, after an excited discussion as to what was the best thing to be done, they decided to carry their prisoners. Four *phoongyees* caught hold of each prisoner, two seizing his legs and the others his shoulders, and bore him off. But the *phoongyees*, being quite unaccustomed to exercise, panted and perspired in a most distressing way, and had to place their loads down every fifty yards or so and have a rest. Consequently their progress was slow; and, when the journey came to an end at a *phoongyee-kyoung*, prisoners

and *phoongyees* were both greatly pleased. The *phoongyee-kyoung* did not, however, contain a prison or any place in which their prisoners could be incarcerated, and the *phoongyees* were in a state of perplexity as to what they should do with them. Some suggested that a prison cage should be built, but the majority did not like the idea, and pointed out that, while the cage was being built, the prisoners might escape. So that suggestion was put aside, and other ways of safely guarding the prisoners were discussed, but none met with approval until a sturdy young priest, recently ordained and not yet reduced by the monastic style of living to the leanness of his brothers, exclaimed in a moment of inspiration—

“Virtuous lords, let the white *kalas* be placed on the island.’

Evidently his hearers knew to which island he referred, for each of them gave vent to an exclamation of approval.

“It is good,” the aged *phoongyee* said, as he bestowed a nod of encouragement on the young priest. “Let the white *kalas* be placed on the island, but let not that foolish fellow Bah Pay be with them. He must be kept in the *kyoung*, for when he is with us he will forget the things which the white *kalas* have taught him, or, if he remembers, will laugh at them. Let no time be wasted, for soon it will be sunset and the prisoners must be on the island before we retire to the *kyoung*.”

The result of the chief *phoongyee*’s speech was that some of the younger men hastily procured several long planks

from the *kyoung* compound, while the others, by sundry kicks, intimated to Arthur, Harold and Ginger Venn that they were to get up from where they were lying. The Englishmen obeyed, but not with a good grace, for they had just begun to feel comfortable. However, their spirits rose when the bonds which confined their legs were severed.

"Proceed," the chief priest commanded, and by blows and kicks the command was made intelligible to the Englishmen.

As they walked off, surrounded and closely watched by the *phoongyees*, Bah Pay struggled to his feet, and by jumping—as if he were competing in a sack race—endeavoured to follow his friends. But as soon as his intention was noticed, two *phoongyees* ran back and knocked him down. And, to prevent him trying to repeat the effort, one of them sat on his chest and remained there.

"I wonder what villainy they're up to now," Arthur said to his companions. "Going to kill us, I suppose."

"They won't do that, sir," Ginger Venn declared, in a very confident tone. "These yellow-robed coves don't kill anything—not even a flea—but I feel jolly certain, seeing how happy they all look, that they're going to do something to us that we shan't like. It's a pity they won't let Bah Pay be with us, for he can read his countrymen a jolly sight better than I can a book. He'd tell us like a shot what they're going to do with us. Hallo, here's a river, and they're taking us towards it,"

"Oh, the scoundrels," Arthur exclaimed, "they're going to make us walk the plank."

"It's more likely, sir, that they'll make a raft and set us adrift on it."

Very soon the Englishmen saw that the *phoongyees* intended to do neither of these things. The planks were to be used for a very different purpose. Almost in the centre of the lake, for such it was, was a small island, on which grew some half-a-dozen palm trees. Between this island and the bank, near where the prisoners and their captors halted, was a series of islets or rocks at irregular distances from each other. The *phoongyees* placed a plank from the bank to the first rock, and, carrying other planks across it, proceeded to fix them from rock to rock until the island was reached. Evidently the *phoongyees* frequently crossed to the island, but for what purpose the Englishmen never discovered.

"It's plain," Harold remarked, when the planks were stretched from the shore to the island, "that they're going to take us over there and leave us."

"If that's all," Arthur replied, "we won't be prisoners much longer. I suppose that you can swim, Ginger Venn?"

"Not with my hands tied, sir."

"Oh, we'll get rid of these ropes, even if I have to gnaw through them. But what silly idiots the fellows must be to think that we can't swim!"

"Perhaps they do not think anything of the kind,"

Harold said, quietly. "Hallo! what are they pointing at?"

That was a question which it was only natural that he should ask, for the *phoongyees*, standing on the brink of the lake, were behaving in a most extraordinary manner. Some peered in the water near their feet, while others gazed across at the bank of the island. And first one and then another would discover what he was looking for, and, while pointing at it with one hand, would, with the other, beckon the Englishmen to come closer and see what it was that he had found. But for a time neither Arthur, Harold nor Ginger Venn could distinguish anything. Then a log-like form on the bank of the island glided quietly into the water.

"A crocodile!" Arthur exclaimed, excitedly. "Oh, look, I can see a dozen of them!"

Arthur did not exaggerate, and his companions soon saw, to their horror, that the lake was alive with them. They knew now what their fate was—to be imprisoned on the island with crocodiles for their jailers. It was a gruesome plan of the *phoongyees*, and the Englishmen found it impossible to conceal their horror. Then the *phoongyees*, seeing that their prisoners understood how futile any attempts to escape by swimming would be, laughed hilariously, and by actions invited them to dive in.

"What I should like to do," Arthur said, "would be to run up against one of those grinning bald-pates and knock him in. I've a jolly good mind to do it too."

Very possibly he would have done so, had not the head priest at that moment commanded his men to send the white *kalas* across the makeshift bridge. Arthur, Harold and Ginger Venn were immediately marched to the first plank, and, so that they should be able to balance themselves while crossing, the ropes which bound their arms to their sides were severed. Ginger Venn, being in the estimation of the priests a more important person than either Arthur or Harold, had the doubtful honour of being the first to tread the planks. When he had passed along the first one, Harold was started off, and, as soon as he had crossed it, Arthur was sent after him.

There were fifteen planks to pass along, some short and others lengthy. The latter were, naturally, somewhat springy, and it was through one of these that a serious accident occurred.

Ginger Venn had passed in safety along twelve of the planks and had got about half-way across the thirteenth—a long springy one—when by some mischance he lost his balance and fell with a tremendous splash into the lake, and immediately two crocodiles were seen approaching him.

A cry of horror burst from both Harold and Arthur, but almost in the same breath, Arthur, remembering that Ginger Venn would be seriously handicapped by his bad arm, sang out—

“All right, Harold. I’ll go after him,” and the next moment, without removing a single article of his clothing, dived in and swam, over-arm, to the rescue.

Harold, pale, and heartsick at the thought of losing his friends, stood for a moment or two trying to think of some way of saving them from the horrible death that threatened them. There was only one thing that he could think of, and that he did. Flinging away his cap, he ran forward a few yards and then dived in alongside of his friends. He did not attempt to assist Arthur in rescuing Ginger Venn, but, turning on his back, started beating the water with his legs to frighten away all the crocodiles who might be near them. The two that were visible, startled by the splashing, disappeared immediately.

"Bravo, Harold!" Arthur shouted, admiringly. "Keep it up, and we'll get ashore after all."

Ginger Venn, who found quickly that his tiger-chawed arm was almost useless for swimming purposes, was now grasping Arthur's jacket with the sound arm, while he struck out strongly with his legs. Being, therefore, almost unhampered, Arthur swam at his utmost speed towards the island, and would soon have got right away from Harold and his protection, had not Harold called to him, "Not so fast, Arthur. If you can manage it, turn on your back and splash about as well."

Arthur did so instantly, and the two kept up an incessant splashing, occasionally beating the water with their hands as well as with their feet. Consequently their progress was terribly slow, and although the temptation to hurry was great, they did not give way to it, believing that they were doing the right thing, in the circumstances.



The two kept up an incessant splashing.

Still, every moment seemed a tremendous space of time, and each of them felt in his heart that he would never reach land—expected every instant to be seized and dragged below. It would be a horrible, loathsome death, and the three Englishmen shuddered at the thought of it. But fear, which was not discreditable to them in the circumstances, did not cause them to relax their exertions in the slightest.

“How much further, Harold?” Arthur called out at last.

“About twenty yards,” Harold replied. “Are you fagged?”

“No fear. Is the landing good straight ahead of us?”

“Yes.”

They said nothing more, but as they drew nearer to land the suspense became terrible. “Shall we do it?” they asked themselves, and did not dare to answer “yes,” for their enemy might be lurking near the bank. They beat the water with their legs more energetically than ever, and Ginger Venn, turning on his back, joined in the splashing.

Harold scanned the spot where they intended to land, and, so far as he could see, it was free from crocodiles.

“Another five yards!” he shouted. “Leave off splashing and swim like mad.”

In a moment Ginger Venn had left go of Arthur, and, heedless of his wounded arm, swam powerfully. Arthur and Harold spurted at the same time, and all three reached the bank together. It was a difficult place to

land, but, in their excitement, the three men made short work of it and scrambled ashore in safety. But even then they did not feel safe, and ran some yards inland to get away from the water and its dreaded denizens.

"Thank God," Arthur exclaimed, when they halted, drenched and exhausted, on a hillock which commanded a good view of the island.

"Yes," Ginger Venn said, "we ought to, sir. It was a wonderful escape."

"Then don't let us forget to do so," Harold added. "There's no time like the present."

So there and then the three Englishmen offered up thanks for their deliverance.

CHAPTER XV

A VISIT FROM THE *PHOONGYEEES*

THE *phoongyees* had, of course, been interested witnesses of their prisoners' adventure. When they saw Ginger Venn fall from the plank they laughed heartily, and waited with unpriestly expectation to see him fall a prey to the crocodiles. That expectation, as we know, was not gratified, but Arthur and Harold's conduct in going to the rescue of their friend was a sensation equally enjoyable because of its novelty. Moreover, there were now three men to be seized by crocodiles instead of one. A few of them admired their pluck—the majority considered them mad—and hoped secretly that they would escape. After watching the white men's tactics for some moments this feeling became general, and when, at last, they saw them scramble to land in safety, they forgot that it was their duty to maintain, at all times, an air of perfect peace, and burst into loud shouts of delight. Unfortunately, this kindly feeling towards the Englishmen was very short-lived. The head priest, who, alone, had not forgotten the dignity of his calling, severely reprimanded

his subordinates for their unseemly behaviour. And when they recognised the heinousness of their offence and begged, penitently, that they might be forgiven, he answered sternly, "Until the white *kalas* are delivered into the hands of the King's soldiers you shall not receive my forgiveness. Therefore guard them safely, and let not one of you think of treating them kindly, as if they were brown men. Remember that the Shway Dagon Pagoda, to which you have yearned for many years to make a pilgrimage, is taken from the holy keeping of our priestly order, and that never again will our beloved people be permitted to worship there."

What the head priest had said was downright nonsense, but he believed honestly that he spoke the truth, and his brother priests placed implicit reliance on every word that he uttered. Therefore they were ready and willing to do anything to avenge the insult which they were told their religion had received. And, in their anger, they vowed that it was very unfortunate that the crocodiles had not seized the prisoners.

The head priest did not, however, permit any time to be wasted in useless regrets.

"Remove the planks," he commanded, and instantly the *phoongyees* whose duty it was to make and unmake the passage to the island hastened to obey. And as they removed the plank that rested on the island itself, Arthur, Harold and Ginger Venn approached and, by signs, begged them to provide dry clothing for them. But the *phoongyees*

paid no heed to their request, and did not even mention it to their superior.

"I always thought that they were a model lot of fellows," Arthur said, as they stood watching the *phoongyees* removing the planks and piling them on the opposite shore, "but I'm bothered if I think it's a priestly act to leave us here, drenched to the skin and without a bit of food to eat."

"Oh, their religion is a very rum one, sir," Ginger Venn replied, with a shrug of his shoulders. "When I was a god I used to see a precious lot of it, and the more I saw of it the less I liked it. I could tell you lots of things that I didn't like, but one will be enough. You know they won't kill anything—man, beast, bird or insect—because their religion says they mustn't. But their religion, so Bah Pay told me, doesn't say anything about ill-treating people or animals, and, consequently, they seem to think they may do just as they like with them. So although they won't kill an animal on any account, they treat them shamefully. I've seen them, hundreds of times, driving bullocks and ponies that were so lame that the poor beasts must have been in dreadful agony every step they took. Ah, it's a rotten religion, young gentlemen, that lets people ill-use dumb animals. And they'll ill-use us, too, I'm sure of it."

"At any rate," Harold joined in, with an attempt at cheerfulness, "don't let us think about it. We've had uncommonly good luck so far, and perhaps it will stick to

us. Fever is what I dread most. And we shall all have it, as sure as my name is Harold, if we don't take off our clothes and dry them quickly."

"You're quite right, sir," Ginger Venn answered. "Let's dry them at once."

So they took off their drenched clothes and spread them on the ground, knowing that the scorching sun would soon dry them.

"But what are we to do about caps?" Arthur asked, as they sat in the shade to avoid sunstroke. "We must have some kind of head covering. We can't always be standing in the shade."

"I'll rig up two caps for you," Ginger Venn volunteered, "if you'll let me cut some cloth out of your jackets."

"Oh, we'll let you," Arthur replied, looking ruefully at his dilapidated uniform spread out in the sun. "You can't possibly make them look worse than they are."

"That's quite true, sir, and if I didn't know as you were young gents I shouldn't have thought you were, judging from the rags you've been wearing. If I were you I should get some native clothes on the first opportunity."

"If you were either of us," Arthur answered, "you'd do nothing of the kind. You'd be as proud of those clothes, ragged though they be, as we are. Until I get another uniform—one of Queen Victoria's—I'll stick to those rags like grim death."

Ginger Venn made no reply, but walked over to his

garments and took out a pair of scissors which he had obtained at the last village, and had guarded jealously throughout his recent adventures. Then he took up Harold's jacket, and cut a large circular piece of cloth from the lower part of it. Arther's jacket he treated in exactly the same fashion. That done, he cut from his own skirt four long strips of cotton cloth, two of which he tied to each piece that had been cut from the tunics.

"Now let me try this one on, sir," he said to Harold, and, placing the cloth on top of his head, tied the strings under his chin in a bow.

Arthur roared with laughter, and even Ginger Venn grinned at the effect of his handiwork ; but Harold treated the affair seriously.

"It's an excellent idea," he declared. "I don't care a fig for appearances ; it's my brain I'm anxious about."

"I can quite understand that," Arthur assured him, "for people usually prize most what they possess but little of."

"Give an instance," Harold said, calmly.

"With pleasure. You're as proud as a peacock of your beard, and yet, if every hair of it was put in a man's soup, he wouldn't discover them."

"You're getting too cheeky, my boy. Apologise, or I'll throw you down and sit on you."

"Never," Arthur declared, dramatically.

"Then down you go," and, as he spoke, Harold ran at Arthur and tried to throw him. Both were good wrestlers,

and, forgetting for a time their unfortunate position, they threw themselves heart and soul into the contest and struggled together, as they had done many times before both in far-away Devon and on their beloved frigate, the *Fox*. At home and on board ship Harold usually proved victorious, and he would have triumphed once more had not Ginger Venn, who was enjoying the sport, suddenly shouted, "Stop thief!" The wrestlers broke away immediately and looked eagerly in all directions, but could see nothing in the shape of a thief.

"I know your game, Ginger Venn," Arthur declared, with mock seriousness. "You didn't relish the idea of a strapping fellow like Harold being thrown by a little fellow like me. Well, he ought to thank you for saving his dignity."

"And you ought to thank me, sir, for saving your shirt."

"My shirt! What do you mean?"

But he needed no answer, for, looking towards the spot where they had left their clothes, he saw a monkey making a searching examination of his shirt.

"Drop it, you rascal!" Arthur shouted, and ran towards the monkey, who, after a rapid survey of him, apparently came to the conclusion that it would not be wise to make a fuss about the shirt, so jumped away in a very frisky manner, not in the least ashamed of having been detected in the act of thieving.

"What with crocodiles and monkeys we shall have a

lively time here," Arthur remarked, as he picked up his recovered shirt. "I know why that monkey tried to steal this. He admired our caps so much that he wanted to try to make one for himself. Hallo! the shirt is as dry as a bone."

The clothes had, indeed, dried marvellously quickly, and the three friends were overjoyed to find that it was so. They put them on immediately, and, feeling comfortable once again, began to discuss the outlook.

"I'm jolly hungry," Arthur declared, and Harold and Ginger Venn admitted that they, too, would very much like to have a good meal. But they all knew that they would have to remain hungry until the morning.

Ginger Venn had impressed that upon them, and, with a sigh of regret, they endeavoured to forget their hunger.

"Let's stroll round the island, sir," Ginger Venn suggested, "and find out a good spot at which to pass the night."

Ginger Venn made the suggestion in the hope that as they strolled around they might find something edible. But he was disappointed. The place was unusually barren for Burma, and Ginger Venn discovered nothing whatever that could, with safety, be eaten. Arthur and Harold had likewise hoped that the inspection of the island might result in food being obtained, but, when they found that such did not prove to be the case, they said nothing, but tightened their belts and enquired about their quarters for the night.

These were soon arranged, but when night came neither Arthur, Harold nor Ginger Venn could sleep. Hunger, and their strange surroundings, banished all inclination for slumber, so they sat quietly side by side; the only sounds that broke the stilly night being the croaking of numberless frogs, the splashing of the fish, and the weird and distant cries of startled jungle beasts. But our friends scarcely heard them—they were thinking of home. Would they ever see it again? With aching hearts and tear-dimmed eyes they confessed to themselves that it was very unlikely. And the thought made Arthur desperate.

“Do crocodiles sleep at night?” he asked, suddenly, startling his companions from their thoughts.

“I don’t think so,” Harold answered. “Why do you wish to know?”

“Because I’m not going to die here without making one more attempt to escape. Let’s try to swim across.”

He jumped to his feet as he spoke, and looked impatiently at his friends.

“Come on,” he continued, excitedly, “don’t let us waste any more time. Let’s get right away before the *phoongyees* come back.”

“No, no, sir,” Ginger Venn replied, getting up quickly and grasping Arthur tightly by the arm. “It would be madness to attempt to swim across. We had one marvelous escape from the crocodiles, and we should be very ungrateful coves if we gave the brutes another chance to put us into their larder. You may be jolly sure that they

wouldn't let us escape twice. And if we did escape them, we shouldn't be free; the *phoongyees* would grab us as soon as we touched land."

"But they are in the monastery. You told us, I remember, that they were never allowed to be out after sunset."

"Well, sir, that is the rule right enough, but they've broken it to-night. I can see several of them on guard over there. Can't you see one standing about twenty yards to the left of the pile of planks?"

"I can see him now, but I shouldn't have noticed him if you hadn't pointed him out to me."

"That's a compliment to my eyesight. Now, I'll point out some more of the lazy rascals."

He did so. He pointed to several other spots on the opposite bank, and, looking in the directions indicated, Arthur and Harold saw at each place a *phoongyee* standing perfectly motionless, his face towards the island.

"Now, young gentlemen," Ginger Venn said, "you see that if we did, by a miracle, escape the crocodiles we shouldn't be free."

"Why not?" Arthur asked. "There are only seven *phoongyees*, and surely we could tackle them."

"Oh yes, sir; we could tackle them, and lick them, too, no doubt, but long before we could get across they'd have called all the other *phoongyees* to come to their help. And we couldn't lick the lot of them, even if we are Englishmen.

No; the best thing we can do is to just wait here and see what turns up."

"Well, I hope some breakfast will turn up. Oh, for a good tuck-in at coffee, eggs and bacon!"

"It's no good dreaming of such luxuries," Harold declared. "We shall eat many scores of plates of rice before we taste coffee again."

"Pooh! it's sickening. I hated rice like poison at school because they gave us such a dose of it, and now it's my misfortune to be living in a land where rice is almost the only thing that is eaten. If they'd give us some treacle with the muck, and let us have 'maggots-and-tar,' I shouldn't mind so much, but ordinary rice—ugh!"

Again silence fell upon the three Englishmen, and after a time, although none would have admitted it, they all fell into a light sleep. Daybreak came and found them awake, cold and hungry.

"Let's have a run!" Arthur suggested, and started off at a trot, but Harold and Ginger Venn declared candidly that they hadn't the strength to do more than walk. Arthur might with truth have said the same, for his trot was a feeble performance, and he was glad of an excuse for letting it degenerate into a walk. They made a circuit of the island three times, and were about to begin a fourth round, when Harold espied a posse of *phoongyees* marching to the relief of their brothers who had watched throughout the night.

"They've got their begging bowls round their necks," Ginger Venn remarked, when Harold had called his attention to them, "so probably they'll give us something to eat. See! they're lifting the planks and carrying them to the rocks. They'll be with us very soon now."

And so they were. The boards were placed in position without a hitch, and, immediately the last one was fixed, six *phoongyees* started to cross over to their prisoners.

"Do you recognise the first one?" Arthur asked, when the *phoongyees* had got half-way, and Harold and Ginger Venn answered "No!"

"Well, it's the fellow who speaks English. Let's pretend, when he talks to us, that we don't understand a word he says. Then if his friends have anything important to tell us, they will send Bah Pay. And Bah Pay is just the man we want to get us out of this place. Remember, don't understand a word of that chap's English."

Harold and Ginger Venn nodded their assent, and all three then went down to meet the *phoongyees* at the water's edge.

"Good - morning!" the foremost priest exclaimed, genially.

The Englishmen made no reply, but gazed at the speaker with cleverly-assumed looks of incomprehension.

"Good-morn—ing," the *phoongyee* repeated slowly and distinctly, but with no better result, for Arthur looked

enquiringly at his friends, who answered with shakes of the head intended to intimate that they could give him no enlightenment.

The *phoongyee* now began to appear perplexed. He looked from one to the other sharply, half suspecting that they were not Englishmen at all. Nevertheless, he gave them further chances to prove their nationality.

“Are you hungry?” he enquired, and it was only by a tremendous effort that they prevented themselves from shouting “Yes!”

Arthur inwardly dubbed himself a silly blockhead for having suggested that they should not understand the *phoongyee*. The sight of food, although it was only rice, made him ravenous, and to his horror he saw that, as they did not admit that they were hungry, the *phoongyee* did not appear disposed to give them the contents of his bowl. But Arthur determined to have that rice somehow or other. He approached the *phoongyee*, and, pointing to the bowl, held out his hands for some of the rice that it contained.

The *phoongyee* nodded his head encouragingly, and, when Arthur was face to face with him, turned up his bowl so that some of its contents were emptied into the midshipman's hands. Harold and Ginger Venn followed their friend's example, and were in turn rewarded with as much food as their hands could hold. They nodded their thanks, and, bending their heads, at once began to eat from the pile in their hands. And never had they

tasted a meal which they enjoyed more than that rice, given them in charity, and eaten with as little refinement as a savage would display.

So quickly did the Englishmen dispose of the food that the *phoongyee* signed to one of his brother priests to advance and turn out his bowl. This second allowance was eaten more slowly, and with less enjoyment now that the edge had been taken off their appetites.

The *phoongyees*, standing a few yards away, looked on in silence until their prisoners' hunger was appeased. Then the English-speaking man advanced and said to them—

“Have you had enough?”

Arthur, Harold and Ginger again shook their heads to make him believe that they did not understand what he said. The *phoongyee*, however, imagined that those shakes of the head meant that they had not had enough, and, delighted at being at last understood, he commanded every priest who had food to give it to them. The quantity they had brought was more than three times three men could hold in their hands, and therefore it was necessary that they should empty it out on to something. But as there was nothing on the island in the way of plates or dishes—with the exception of the bowls which the *phoongyees* carried, and, being priestly articles, they could not be lent to ordinary men—they decided to pour it out on the ground. That act was, however, preceded by a performance which astonished Arthur and Harold completely. The *phoongyees* withdrew a few yards from them until they came to a spot

devoid of any sign of vegetable growth, where they went down cautiously on their knees and made a searching examination of the ground. For some moments it seemed as if their search would be a fruitless one, but, just as the Englishmen were beginning to wonder what their object was, one of the *phoongyees* stretched out his hand and placed his first finger on the ground, moving it every moment a quarter of an inch or so, first one way and then another. At last he kept it stationary for a space and then rose carefully to his feet, his finger still pointed out and his eyes fixed steadily on it. In that manner he walked slowly away, and, as he passed the Englishmen, they saw that on his outstretched finger a tiny insect was crawling.

“What is he up to?” Arthur whispered to his friends.

“Watch him, sir,” Ginger Venn answered, softly, “and you’ll see.”

They did watch, and what they saw was that when the *phoongyee* got some distance away he went down on to his knees again, and, resting his finger on the earth, allowed the insect to crawl off it. Then, jumping up quickly, he hurried back to endeavour to repeat the performance. But by that time many of his brother priests were walking slowly away with insects crawling on their fingers. Some had several on one finger, and not a few had decoyed insects so big that they looked capable of forcibly resenting such interference with their strolls. All these insects were, like the first one mentioned, deposited, uninjured, on

the ground some yards from the spot whence they had been taken. Soon no insects remained there, and when the *phoongyees* had made themselves quite confident that such was the case, they emptied all the food that their begging bowls contained on to the ground. It made quite a large pile, and when Arthur saw it he said to Harold and Ginger Venn—the English-speaking *phoongyee* being some distance away —“I don’t think that they need have been frightened of letting the insects help themselves. There’s enough in that heap to feed a few million insects.”

“They weren’t frightened of the insects eating it,” Ginger Venn replied, evidently amused at Arthur’s mistake. “They were frightened of turning out the food on them and squashing them. And if they’d done that, well, sir, they’d have been considered murderers. One of their commandments is, ‘Thou shalt not destroy life.’ Bah Pay told me that when I asked him why his countrymen were so careful not to kill fleas, mosquitoes, and such things that ain’t no good to anybody. What you saw the *phoongyees* do just now is what I have seen done hundreds of times.”

“But if they are so afraid of killing insects, I am surprised that they dare even walk,” Arthur remarked. “For it’s impossible for any one to move a hundred yards, in this land of numberless kinds of insects, without treading on a score or two of them.”

“Well, sir, I’m not sticking up for their religion. I

only tell you what I know about it. Bah Pay will tell you if treading on insects accidentally doesn't count."

"Unfortunately," Harold joined in, "there seems little prospect of our seeing Bah Pay again. Perhaps his countrymen have killed him because he assisted us to escape from our first captors. Hallo! here comes our friend the English-speaker. Shall we keep up the deception of not understanding him, or speak out and try to discover what has become of Bah Pay, and what our fate is to be?"

"Oh, don't go and spoil my plans," Arthur protested. "Everything is going off splendidly. I can tell from the looks of many of the *phoongyees* that they begin to suspect that their friend can't speak English at all."

"That's rather hard on the poor fellow, considering that he speaks our language uncommonly well."

"Hush! Here he is."

The English-speaking *phoongyee* now made one last attempt to enter into conversation with the white men by saying, "To-morrow we will come again and bring you plenty more food."

But once again the Englishmen gazed at him with the puzzled look of men who strive, but in vain, to understand the meaning of something which is beyond their comprehension.

"You are vile dogs," the *phoongyee* declared, angrily, "to pretend that you are English *kalas*. You are Frenchmen."

This taunt failing to produce any outward effect, the *phoongyee* told his brothers to retrace their steps across the plank causeway. Then, looking searchingly at the prisoners, he said, slowly and distinctly, "Good-day."

Arthur pretending that he thought "Good-day" meant "Follow the *phoongyees*," nodded his head and started off towards the planks, closely followed by Harold and Ginger Venn.

"Stop them, stop them," the *phoongyee* shouted to his brothers in Burmese, but Arthur was determined to have a try for freedom, and, rushing at a priest who attempted to bar his way, knocked him backwards and got on the first plank. But no further. A string of priests extended all along the wooden path, and to get past them was an impossibility. Nevertheless, Arthur, being a lad who, when excited, attempted frequently to perform impossibilities, rushed at the foremost man and the next minute found himself, together with six or seven *phoongyees*, struggling in the water. In a moment Arthur struck out for the island and reached it in safety, just as one of the priests was seized by a crocodile and disappeared beneath the water. The other *phoongyees*, who escaped with nothing worse than a wetting and a terrible fright, passed rapidly across the path to land, the English-speaking priest bringing up the rear and removing the planks as he retired.

"It strikes me," Harold said, when the three prisoners were again alone on the island, "that it would have been

better for us if we had not taken Arthur's advice. We have certainly gained nothing by doing so."

Harold was, however, on this occasion in error, for when the *phoongyees* reported that their brother, who said he could speak English, was not understood by the white men, he was regarded as having told a lie and was punished by being expelled from the priesthood. And, moreover, it was decided by the chief *phoongyee* that on future occasions Bah Pay should accompany the priests to act as interpreter.

CHAPTER XVI

CRICKET ON CROCODILE ISLAND

AFTER the departure of the *phoongyees*, Arthur, Harold and Ginger Venn found the time pass very slowly. They explored the island once more, but it was so small that their searching investigation of its resources did not occupy more than twenty minutes. They had hoped to discover something out of which a raft could be made, but the palm trees, the only things that could possibly be used for that purpose, unfortunately required to be cut down and trimmed. And that could not be accomplished with Ginger Venn's pair of scissors, the only tool which they possessed.

"We shall have to give up the raft idea," Harold said decisively, adding, thoughtfully, "I wonder how the monkeys get across."

"Oh, they ride on the crocodiles' backs," Arthur declared readily, but Harold ignored his remark and continued, "It is quite certain that the cheeky things don't live here, for, if you remember, we did not hear a sound of them during the night. We must keep a sharp watch this morning and find out how they depart."

"I can tell you, sir, without any waiting," Ginger Venn joined in. "They jump from rock to rock. When I was a heathen god I often saw them cross a river in that way."

"Well," Harold said, "it's quite certain that we can't do that. As far as I can see, there is nothing we can do now, but sit still and trust to Providence."

"How about a balloon?" Arthur asked. "You're an aeronaut, Ginger Venn; can't you make one and let us all sail away to freedom in it?"

"Well, sir, if you can find the stuff to make it with, I'll have a try, but, when I've finished it, you won't find me trusting myself in it. I've had quite enough of balloons to last me as long as I live, and if the best balloon-maker in the world was to come here and say, 'Ginger Venn, get in this balloon and it will carry you back to India,' I'd say, 'No, thank you, sir, I'll stay here with the crocodiles until I can escape like a man and not like a bird. If the Almighty had meant us to fly, He'd have given us wings.'"

"Oh, I don't agree with you there. He hasn't given us tails or fins, and yet we can swim. I dare say that some day it will be discovered that, by working our arms and legs in some particular way, we shall be able to fly."

Harold now came to the conclusion that his friends were getting out of their depth, and brought their conversation to a close by suggesting that they should have a game of cricket.

"Oh, that would be fine," Arthur exclaimed delightedly.

"But where are the bat, ball and stumps to come from?"

"We'll soon make them. Ginger Venn, can you spare us a bit of your skirt to make into a cricket-ball?"

"Certainly, sir, but it's getting shorter every day. What with bandages, pocket-handkerchiefs and cricket-balls, it'll look like a kilt soon."

"Never mind about that. You'll be able to get another skirt from the *phoongyees*, but we can't get new trousers. So out with your scissors and cut off a lump."

Ginger Venn did as he was desired without any further hesitation, and, with the piece of skirt that he cut off, Harold made a decent-looking ball, by tying it tightly round some bent pieces of bamboo. The four stumps, for of course they could only play single wicket, were quickly made out of stout jungle plants, but the bat took nearly an hour to fashion, and, when it was finished, the thing that it resembled most was a spade.

Arthur went in first, Harold bowling and Ginger Venn, in spite of his bad arm, keeping wicket. Arthur insisted upon having a trial ball, and played it as scientifically as the ground and bat would admit of, but, slogging at the second ball, he was clean bowled. He was horribly disgusted, but said nothing, and, going on to bowl, did his utmost to send down some very tricky balls. Success did not, however, reward his efforts, and Harold made twenty runs in a very short time.

"I'll have one more ball," Arthur said to Ginger Venn, "and then you can try to get him out."

But, as it happened there was no need for Ginger Venn to try his luck, for Arthur's last ball broke in tremendously and hit the wicket.

Ginger Venn then went in and played hurricane cricket. He slogged lustily at every ball he received, and soon passed Harold's score with a drive right into the lake. A crocodile fielded the ball, and retired out of sight to investigate the nature of his prize. Another ball was soon made, and that, too, was speedily slogged into the lake. A third ball met the same fate. Harold was quite willing to make a fourth, but Ginger Venn objected.

"No, sir," he said firmly, "I'd rather be out than part with any more of my skirt. We've had a good game, so now let us sit down and rest."

The proposal did not exactly meet with Arthur's approval, as he was most anxious to wipe out the disgrace of having been bowled second ball, but, finding that Harold agreed with Ginger Venn, he smothered his annoyance and followed their example by lying down at full length in the shade. The exertion they had undergone had tired them out completely, and in a very few minutes all three were sound asleep. How long they slept they never quite knew, but they awoke with a start by hearing some one shout in Burmese, "Hi! hi! Get up, get up, or I'll cut your eyelids off."

They recognised the voice at once, for there was no

mistaking that "Hi! hi!" and, sitting up, they saw, a few yards away, their former captor, MOUNG KOON, with BAH PAY at his side. Both of the Burmans grinned with delight when they saw the surprise that their presence caused the Englishmen, and it was very evident that MOUNG KOON bore them no ill-feeling for having escaped from his custody.

"Get up, get up!" he exclaimed, cheerfully, "or I'll chop your fingers off," and BAH PAY, in duty bound, interpreted his command.

The Englishmen knew MOUNG KOON well enough by this time to be aware that there was not the slightest fear of his carrying out his sanguinary threats; nevertheless, they obeyed him promptly. They remembered that he was a good-natured, kind-hearted fellow, and there was a possibility, they thought, that he would prevail upon the *phoongyees* to treat them with more consideration.

ARTHUR walked up to him and held out his hand, which MOUNG KOON grasped and shook vigorously. Then the Burman turned towards HAROLD and GINGER VENN, with the intention of bestowing a hand grip on each, but found that they were talking to BAH PAY.

"Hi! hi!" he shouted, in alarm. "Leave off talking to the white *kalas*, BAH PAY, or I'll cut your head off and throw it to the crocodiles. You must only talk to the white *kalas* when I tell you to do so."

"My lord," BAH PAY answered, respectfully, "I live but to obey your commands. All I said to the white *kalas*

was that you were a very clever man. I told them that when the village people set you free, they thought that you would never be able to overtake the white *kalas*. But you travelled night and day; you never slept, and while you walked and ran you ate your food. Therefore, you have overtaken the white *kalas*. My lord, that is what I have told them, and they are amazed at my words."

Moung Koon was satisfied completely.

"Yes," he said, with a complacent smile, "it was very wonderful of me."

"My lord, it was, and, when the news reaches the Golden Ears, you will be raised to a high position."

"It must not reach the Golden Ears," Moung Koon exclaimed in great alarm. "It must never be known that the white *kalas* escaped from me."

"My lord, it shall not be known," Bah Pay assured him, without a moment's hesitation.

"Tell the white *kalas* what I say."

Bah Pay turned to the Englishmen, who were wondering what was the cause of Moung Koon's excitement, and said, "My lords, Moung Koon commands me to say that you must never let it be known that you escaped from him. You must let people think, when we get to Ava, that, from the day he captured us in the pass, we have never been out of his custody."

"But why are we to do that?" Arthur enquired. "Is Moung Koon ashamed of his men's behaviour at the battle with the hereditary slaves?"

"My lord, I can answer your first question only. If it should reach the Golden Ears that Mounk Koon was not powerful enough to prevent us from escaping from him he would certainly be degraded. His gold chains of office would be taken from him, and possibly one of his arms or legs would be chopped off. My lord, Mounk Koon is a kind man, and he has treated us as if we were his guests rather than his prisoners. Therefore, we should be vile men if we caused harm to be done to him."

"Never fear, Bah Pay, we'll not split on him," Arthur declared, earnestly. "Englishmen don't forget to repay a kindness done to them."

"My lord, that is quite true, but Mounk Koon does not understand Englishmen so well as I do. He will be very pleased when I tell him what you have said, and, when we reach Ava, he will still be your friend."

"Hi! hi!" Mounk Koon interrupted, impatiently. "What do the white *kalas* say?"

"My lord," Bah Pay answered, promptly, "the words they utter are pleasing. They promise you that it shall never be known that, by the aid of some of our countrymen, they escaped for a time from your keeping."

"It is good," Mounk Koon declared, with great relief. "It is very good. Now we will depart, but tell the white *kalas* to walk straight, for, if they fall off the planks into the water, the crocodiles will certainly seize them. They

have eaten many brown men, and would like a white one for a change."

Bah Pay repeated this caution to the Englishmen, but it was quite unnecessary, for they had no intention whatever of giving the crocodiles another chance to lay in a stock of food. They walked very carefully along the planks, and experienced a feeling of intense relief when they reached the shore, where two or three hundred fully-armed soldiers were awaiting them.

"But where are the *phoongyees*?" Harold enquired of Bah Pay, as soon as he noticed that none of them were present.

"My lord, they have returned to their monastery. As soon as they had captured us, they sent messengers in all directions in search of soldiers, and these men soon arrived. The *phoongyees* then went off, leaving Mounk Koon in charge of them. We shall not see them again."

"And a jolly good job too," Arthur declared, emphatically, "for they were the stingiest lot of Burmese that ever I met. They gave us nothing but rice."

Further conversation was impossible, for Mounk Koon, who was now getting his force into marching trim, was making a tremendous noise, threatening fiercely to cut off the head, arms, legs, or nose of every man who did not promptly obey him. And certainly those threats had the desired effect, for every man in the force acted with a smartness and intelligence which the Englishmen had never before detected in Burmese soldiers.

"Hi! hi!" MOUNG KOON shouted, when everything was ready. "March! And walk quickly, or I'll cut all your legs off."

"If he does that," Arthur remarked to his friends, when he understood the threat, "it will be the funniest-looking regiment that ever existed."

"Guard the white *kalas* closely," MOUNG KOON continued, "and treat them well. If any harm is done to them, I'll cut all your heads off."

"That," Arthur whispered, "will make his army look still more funny. I almost hope that he'll carry out his threats."

"Oh no, you don't," Harold declared, "so don't waste your breath in telling whoppers."

"And don't waste yours in giving me advice. Why shouldn't I wish that he'd cut off their heads and legs, if it gave us a chance of escape? An army composed of headless and legless men wouldn't keep us prisoners many minutes, I know."

"But you forget that if MOUNG KOON were to do such a mad thing as slaughter his own army, he wouldn't be at all likely to spare us. What do you think, Ginger Venn?"

"Well, sir, to tell the truth, I don't think it's worth thinking about at all, because MOUNG KOON is so tender-hearted that I don't believe he could order a mouse to be killed. He's just like some of these here Burmese guns that make plenty of noise, but don't do no harm to anybody. If every man in this here crowd don't die of old

age it won't be MOUNG KOON's fault. All I hope, young gentlemen, is that when we get to Ava, MOUNG KOON won't be sent off to some other place. While he's about, I don't think that we shall ever be badly treated, but if he goes, well, we shall get about as much politeness from his countrymen as a cat gets from an old man with the gout when she rubs herself against his foot. Hallo! here comes MOUNG KOON. He's going to speak to us."

"I expect that he's going to threaten to cut our tongues off," Arthur said, "for that's about the only part he hasn't vowed to cut off."

"It's a wonder," Harold declared, "considering that you are with us, that the tongue wasn't the first thing he threatened to deprive us of."

"I quite agree with you, Harold, that it is strange our tongues haven't been threatened, for a chap who tries to talk sarcastically certainly puts his to a purpose for which it was not intended. Your tongue ought to be pruned."

"Hi! hi!" MOUNG KOON shouted to BAH PAY. "Tell the white *kalas* that in two days we shall reach Ava. It is a glorious city, and the two young *kalas* must not enter it in the rags they are now wearing. They must wear Burmese clothes."

"Tell him that we flatly refuse to do so," Arthur said, as soon as BAH PAY had interpreted MOUNG KOON's command.

"BAH PAY," Harold exclaimed, sharply, "don't say anything of the kind. We must discuss the matter

before we reply. A hasty answer might get us into Moun'g Koon's bad books."

"Burmese clothes are beautifully comfortable," Ginger Venn joined in. "I've worn them now for nearly three years, and hope to stick to them as long as I remain in this country. They're very healthy, too."

"It's the Queen's uniform we're wearing, Harold," Arthur said, seriously, "and I strongly object to discarding it."

"And I can assure you that I don't like the idea either," Harold replied. "If our uniforms were presentable and a credit to the service, I'd die before I'd agree to discard them. But what with our rags and our Ginger Venn-made hats—which though useful are decidedly old-womanish—we look more like scarecrows than British officers. Do we not, Ginger Venn?"

"You do, sir," Ginger Venn agreed, unhesitatingly, "and if any of the gentlemen from your ship was to see you now, I fancy they'd about kill themselves with laughing. You look bad enough, sir, but Mr. Arthur looks ten times worse."

The latter assertion was a piece of Ginger Venn's fiction, but it brought about the result which he intended that it should.

Arthur surveyed his friend critically, and came to the conclusion that, if he looked worse than Harold, he must indeed be a disreputable sight.

"Well, Harold, perhaps you are right," Arthur said.

"We don't look a credit to the service, and, if you want me to dress up in Burmese clothes, I'll do so."

"That's right, Arthur. I'm glad that you agree with me, because I'm certain that we should not create a favourable impression at Ava if we entered the place in rags. And I have no doubt that our happiness as slaves will depend to a great extent upon what the Queen of Burma thinks of us when she sees us for the first time. Bah Pay, tell MOUNG KOON that we have no objection to putting on Burmese clothes."

Bah Pay did so immediately, and MOUNG KOON, who had been waiting, somewhat impatiently, to hear what his prisoners would say to his proposal, remarked, "It is good; the white *kalas* are wise men." Then he turned and shouted to a native trader, who was travelling to Ava under the protection of the soldiers, "Hi! hi! bring the white *kalas* new clothes. Give them the best that you have, or I'll cut your toes off."

The trader, half pleased and half terrified at being addressed by such an important person as MOUNG KOON, picked up his bundle of goods, and, running to the Englishmen, placed it at their feet. When he opened it he produced for inspection the best and most expensive goods it contained, but finding, very quickly, that his customers had not the means to pay for anything, he returned them hurriedly to his bundle, and, producing in their place the cheapest things he had, sang their praises loudly and pointed out the numberless, imaginary, good

qualities which they possessed. But, unfortunately for the trader, MOUNG KOON, being a fighting man by profession, and accustomed to helping himself to everything that he required without paying for it, had a very poor opinion of men who tried to sell things, and, thinking it very possible that the Englishmen would be swindled, he came back to help them choose their clothes. The trader did not hear him approach, and continued to praise his almost worthless goods in most extravagant terms.

"You dog!" MOUNG KOON exclaimed, and, stepping forward, struck him full in the face with his hand, knocking him flat on his back.

"Give the white *kalas* the best clothes," he shouted, furiously. "Quick, quick, or I'll cut your legs off."

The trader, terrified almost out of his senses at the bare thought of losing his legs, jumped up and made a dash for the jungle. Some of the soldiers started in pursuit of him, but MOUNG KOON called to them to come back.

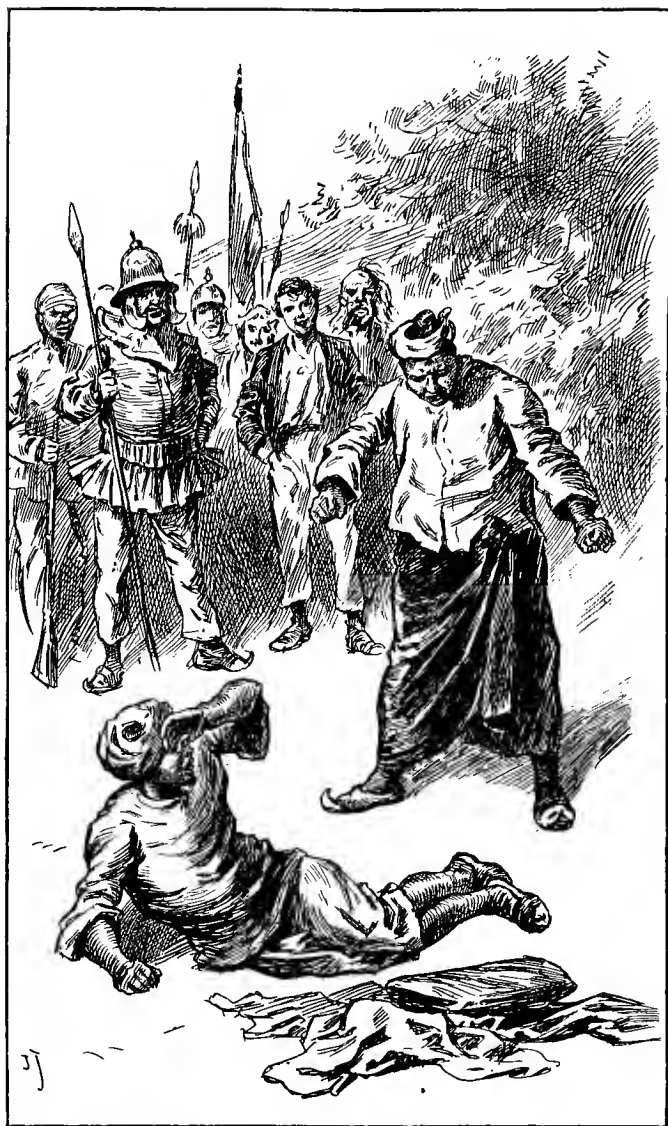
"Let the dog go," he added, with a broad grin. "He has left his goods behind him."

The soldiers roared with laughter, just as if they were school-boys and MOUNG KOON their master. Of course, that appreciation of his joke put him in a very good humour, and, squatting down, he opened the bundle wide and examined its contents critically. He selected the best of everything, and, when three complete costumes—

Ginger Venn was to have a new suit also—had been made up, presented them to the Englishmen.

“Tell them,” he said to Bah Pay, “to put them on at once.”

Bah Pay repeated the command, whereupon Arthur, Harold and Ginger Venn picked up their new clothes and retired to a secluded spot to put them on. Bah Pay went with them to give any assistance that might be required, and it was fortunate that he did, for Arthur and Harold soon discovered that it was a very difficult thing to put on clothes that were devoid of buttons, button-holes, hooks or strings. The short loose jackets were not unlike European garments and were easily donned, but it was the *lungyi* that gave such trouble. A *lungyi* was a long piece of cloth that went round the waist, between the legs, and was finished off by being tucked in, in a way that the Burmese found as easy as eating, but which perplexed two of the Englishmen greatly. Do what they might, Arthur and Harold could not get that garment to keep on. At last Ginger Venn took Arthur in hand, and Pah Pay assisted Harold, with the result that, when each had made about twenty attempts, they acquired the knack. Then they turned their attention to putting on turbans, and that, also, was not an easy job, for Arthur and Harold could not wear them in the fashion of the natives, which left the top of the head uncovered. Ginger Venn, who had himself solved that difficulty more than a year previously, proceeded to



“Give the white *kalas* the best clothes,” he shouted.—P. 265.

explain to his countrymen the best way for them to wear turbans. It took a good deal of learning, but Arthur and Harold mastered the trick eventually. They were now fully dressed in Burmese clothes, the only European article they wore being their boots. Their socks had been discarded as useless long ago.

"Well, we do look a pair of guys," Arthur exclaimed in disgust, after a close examination of himself and Harold. "It's more like a bathing dress than a suit of clothes I've got on."

"Mine is just the same," Harold answered, "and I really think that I shall like it."

But he had scarcely finished speaking when he began to change his mind and wish that he had trousers on again, for the skirt that he wore did not reach down to his knees, and, consequently, there was a long stretch of bare legs on which mosquitoes had never, until then, had a chance to feed. In a few minutes all the mosquitoes in the neighbourhood seemed to have heard that there were four tasty white legs awaiting them, and came hurrying to partake of the feast. Again and again Harold and Arthur brushed the tiny gourmands from their bare flesh, but the relief they got by so doing was momentary, for the pests returned with fresh appetites after each forced fly.

Arthur began to get desperate, but his vows of a wholesale slaughter of mosquitoes were cut short by Moungh Koon's voice. "Hi! hi!" it said, "you have been a very long time. Come quickly, or I'll cut your lips off."

"My lords," Bah Pay said, after he had interpreted Moungh Koon's latest thing in the way of threats, "let us return to him."

So, attired in their new clothes, Arthur, Harold and Ginger Venn quitted their dressing-ground and advanced towards Moungh Koon. They expected that he would be pleased at their appearance, but the sight of Arthur and Harold's European boots had a most exciting effect upon him.

"Take them off! Take them off!" he commanded angrily, pointing to the boots, and it was only when Bah Pay explained to him, in a very humble manner, that the prisoners had soft feet and could not walk without boots, that he became calm.

"Let them wear wooden boots," he said, and commanded Bah Pay, with the customary threat, to procure them quickly.

This, strangely enough, Bah Pay was able to do, two of Moungh Koon's lieutenants having boots, or rather sandals, which they agreed to part with in exchange for the midshipmen's cast-off clothes. But when Arthur and Harold saw the sandals they were not at all pleased with the appearance of them, for they were, in fact, little more than flat pieces of thick wood, to be kept in position by a mushroom-shaped peg which went between the big and second toes. And when they tried to walk in them they were still less pleased. But they had to wear them.

CHAPTER XVII

FLY-CATCHER TO THE COURT OF BURMA !

MOUNG KOON being now satisfied with the Englishmen's appearance, the journey to Ava was resumed, but before a mile had been covered, Arthur and Harold were as tired as if they had walked twenty.

"It's these wretched sandals," Arthur explained to Bah Pay. "They *will* keep slipping off. Both my big toes are aching horribly through trying to grasp those pegs."

"My lord, you will get used to them in time," Bah Pay assured him, but Arthur was not to be cheered in that way.

"I shall be dead lame if I walk another quarter of a mile," he declared, petulantly, "so you had better warn old MOUNG KOON at once. He might just as well cut off our feet as try to make us walk on these bits of wood."

"Mr. Drayton is quite right," Harold said. "If we are not allowed to have our boots, we shall have to be carried or else left here."

Finding that the midshipmen were in earnest, Bah Pay went straight to MOUNG KOON and told him of their

difficulty, whereupon the great man shouted with laughter. But when he had got over the merriment which the idea of people being unable to wear Burmese sandals had aroused, he hurried to the midshipmen to see whether they were really as uncomfortable as Bah Pay stated. He examined their feet, and, finding that they were swollen and in some places lacerated, and that they could not keep the pegs between their toes, he became truly sorry for them.

“Hi ! hi !” he shouted to the man who was carrying their cast-off clothes tied up in a big bundle. “Bring the white *kalas* their boots. Quick, quick !”

In less than a minute the man had untied his bundle and given the boots to their former owners, who put them on as quickly as possible.

They thanked Moungh Koon heartily for his kindness, and their expression of gratitude pleased the worthy Burman greatly. But even now Arthur and Harold's troubles were not at an end, for the hundreds of mosquitoes, and other and larger insects, which had been feasting on their bare legs ever since they had changed their trousers for short skirts, now became almost unbearable. The killing of some score of these pests brought no relief, for the number of the attackers increased, rather than grew less, with every few minutes, and the irritation which they caused made Arthur and Harold scratch themselves so viciously that they fetched blood in some places.

Bah Pay suggested that he should report their condition to MOUNG KOON, but the midshipmen would not give their consent to his doing so ; in fact, they forbade him to make any more complaints to their captor. But, very fortunately, MOUNG KOON soon detected the streaks of blood on their white skin, and, imagining that some of his men had ill-treated the prisoners, he became even more than usually excited.

"Hi ! hi !" he yelled to his lieutenants. "Who has dared to hurt the white *kalas*? Find the dog and kill him at once. Quick, quick !"

The lieutenants set to work immediately to try to discover the culprit or culprits, but every man in the force protested loudly that no one had touched the prisoners.

What would have happened had not Bah Pay there and then disregarded the midshipmen's recent instructions, and informed MOUNG KOON what had caused the white men's blood to flow, it is impossible to say. It was a very surprising piece of news for MOUNG KOON, as mosquitoes caused him little or no inconvenience, possibly because he was old and tough. Nevertheless, he called for the doctor, with the usual threat that delay would cost him a limb.

The doctor arrived on the spot in great haste, and examined the white legs with immense interest. ARTHUR and HAROLD were the first white patients that he had ever had, and he was determined to make the most of the

occasion. He produced from the folds of his skirt three or four very ordinary-looking twigs, which he passed gently up and down their legs, accompanying the action with a number of exclamations and grunts, which sounded very dreadful to his patients' unenlightened ears.

"At any rate," Arthur observed, "the mosquitoes don't seem frightened at his language. Just look, they'll hardly get out of the way of the twigs. He's a hum-bug."

And certainly there was good reason for believing that Arthur had summed the doctor up correctly, for, in spite of his mysterious actions and weird incantations, the mosquitoes did not become less annoying.

"It seems to me," Arthur said, "that he's given the wretched little worrits fresh appetite. Hallo! what's he going away for? Going to call in a physician perhaps."

"My lord," Bah Pay answered, "he will return soon and he will do you good."

Bah Pay's prophecy was fulfilled completely, for in less than five minutes they saw the doctor approaching, carrying on his head a tray containing a pile of what appeared to be mud.

"Oh, crikey, poultices!" Arthur groaned. "I hate poultices."

"Don't grumble," Harold chimed in. "Bah Pay has faith in the man, so I'll trust him."

The doctor now placed his tray on the ground, and, after

indulging in a few more mysterious signs and invocations, took up a handful of the wet mud and dabbed it suddenly on Arthur's knee. Arthur's first idea was to retaliate with his fist, but with a laudable effort he overcame the temptation and stood perfectly still and uncomplaining while the doctor spread the slime all over his legs. Afterwards, Harold's nether limbs were treated in the same uncleanly fashion, but Ginger Venn declined the doctor's services, for mosquitoes had long since ceased to cause him any great inconvenience.

"My lords," the doctor exclaimed, bowing low to Arthur and Harold, "the mosquitoes will not worry you again," and to the midshipmen's great surprise they did not.

Now that the doctor had done his work, MOUNG KOON ordered the march to be resumed, and Arthur and Harold stepped out in much better spirits, albeit they were both disgusted with the dirty state of their legs. Every now and then when a piece of the mud got caked and fell off, the doctor, who kept a close watch on them, hurried forward and dabbed some fresh stuff on the spot. These kindly doctoral attacks helped to relieve the monotony of the following thirty-six hours, for, now that MOUNG KOON's force was drawing near to Ava, the bullock track became wide, villages were frequently passed, and pagodas were as plentiful as telegraph poles beside an English railway cutting. Some people would imagine that those signs of semi-civilisation would have been a great relief to Arthur,

Harold and Ginger Venn after their months of journeying through the jungle, but the travellers, who throughout their weary wanderings had never quite given up all hope of rescue or escape, knew that with every step they took towards Ava the chances of ever seeing again their native land grew less. Once in Ava their life-long slavery would commence. It was an awful thought and enough to dispirit older campaigners than Arthur and Harold. It would be folly to say that they were not dispirited, for the Englishman's love of his native land was strong in them, and the thought of never seeing their home again was the bitterest one that they could possibly have.

But dispirited as they were, they could not refrain from admiring the barbaric splendour of Ava when at last, surrounded by a huge crowd of the inquisitive inhabitants, they entered the capital, which in its time had been the scene of gorgeous pageants, of Buddhist-world-famed festivals, of wholesale slaughterings and ghastly atrocities.

Marching through the city and passing along by the side of the outer wall of the palace, Mounk Koon led his prisoners to a low-built, substantial-looking house standing alone, within a stone's throw of the palace gates.

"My lords," Bah Pay said to the Englishmen, "Mounk Koon commands you to enter that house, and not to quit it until he gives you permission."

So Arthur, Harold and Ginger Venn walked up the plank which led to the front door and entered their

temporary abode, well pleased to get away from the crowd of sightseers.

"It looks very much as though a European had lived here," Harold remarked, after a glance round the place, and noting the chairs and other pieces of furniture which were not to be found in native houses.

"My lord, a white man did live here," Bah Pay answered. "He was a Spaniard."

"Has he left the country?"

"My lord, he has. The King had his head chopped off. Moungh Koon told me so."

"Possibly," Arthur said, "there is a washstand or a bath in the place. I'm tired of being in this filthy condition, and would rather be clean and put up with the mosquitoes than be caked with mud like a pig."

"My lord, there is the bath-room," Bah Pay said, pointing to a small room opposite the one in which they were standing. Arthur, with a whistle of astonishment, hurried to indulge in the unexpected luxury, but nothing in the shape of a bath could he find. All that the room contained was a stone slab which covered half the floor, and on it two big jars full of water.

"My lord, that is the bath," Bah Pay declared, in answer to his enquiry as to where the bath was.

"Indeed! Well, what am I supposed to do? Stand with a leg in each jar? That won't be any good for my shoulders and body."

"My lord, you must not stand in the jars," Bah Pay

explained, with an astonished look on his face. "You must stand on that slab, dip those little mugs into the jars and then pour the water over yourself. It will be very refreshing."

"I'll try it, then," Arthur declared. "Where are the towels? Oh, I see one. By Jingo, that Spaniard must have been a cleanly fellow. Retire, gentlemen, and I'll bathe."

But as Arthur's friends quitted the room by the door a visitor entered at the window. It was a crow, and a Burmese crow is about as cheeky and daring a bird as ever flew. This particular bird settled on a box at the window and surveyed Arthur with great interest. But Arthur, resenting its intrusion and fearing that it might fly away with some of his garments, flicked the towel at it. With an indignant caw the crow flapped his wings and flew hurriedly to the roof of the nearest house, where possibly he related, in bird language, the insult he had received from a man—a white man. Evidently he obtained the sympathy of his fellow-crows, for, when he returned to Arthur's bath-room, he was accompanied by eleven of them. And there they perched in a long black row along his window-sill. Arthur was undecided what to do. He had driven away one crow and twelve came. If he drove twelve away, a hundred and forty-four might appear. The prospect of having so many onlookers was far from being pleasant, so he came to the conclusion that the wisest thing he could do would be to take no notice

of the crows. He undressed, dipped a mug into one of the jars, and was just going to pour the water over his head when he espied a big fat rat walking leisurely towards him. This intrusion was a good deal more than Arthur could stand, and, without a moment's hesitation, he threw the mug at the rat. It was a bad shot, and as the rat disappeared unharmed under the door the mug flew up and went slap into the line of crows, knocking two of the birds off their perch and startling the others into flight. They did not return, but, judging from the noise they made on the roof of the neighbouring house, they held an indignation meeting and denounced Arthur in very strong terms. But as soon as the crows had disappeared, Arthur forgot all about them, and continued, or rather began, his bath. Some score of times he dipped the remaining mug into one of the jars and poured the water over him. It was delightfully refreshing, and when he had removed the mud from his legs, and given himself a few final showers, he felt stronger than ever he had done since he left the *Fox*.

When he had dressed, he spoke so enthusiastically about the bath, omitting any reference to crows and rats, that Harold indulged in one, and, after him, Ginger Venn bathed.

Soon, filled with new life, they assembled in the best room to have a chat.

"I feel up to anything now," Arthur declared. "We are in Burmese costume, so what is there to prevent our trying to escape?"

"Look out at the window," Harold said, rather brusquely.

Arthur did so, and saw at once that there was not the slightest chance of their escaping, for around the house was a cordon of armed soldiers. There were two hundred of them at least, and behind them was a huge mob of squatting, smoking Burmese, waiting patiently in the hope of catching a glimpse of the prisoners. They saw Arthur's face, and were evidently as pleased at the sight as if they had seen a giant or a dwarf. But Arthur did not care about being stared at, and withdrew quickly from the window.

"Well, as we can't escape," he said to his friends, "let us enjoy ourselves. We don't know what this heathen queen will do with us to-morrow, so let us make the most of to-day. Spin us a yarn, Ginger Venn."

"Certainly, sir," Ginger Venn replied, and related some extraordinary tales of things which had happened while he was the Great Red Nat. By the time that he had finished night had rushed up, and, as the prisoners were not allowed to have lights of any description, they lay down and slept peacefully.

About five o'clock in the morning they were aroused by some one pulling their legs, and, looking up, beheld a gorgeously attired Burman standing before them.

"Hi! hi!" he exclaimed, as loudly as if he were giving orders to a regiment. "Get up, get up. Quick, quick, or I'll cut your feet off."

Then of course they knew who was the disturber of their

slumber. They obeyed him, and as they did so gazed in amazement at his elaborate attire. On his head was a big velvet cap, in shape somewhat like a leg of mutton with the knuckle uppermost, while through the distended lobe of each ear was a gold tube about six inches long. In place of the plain short skirt, in which the Englishmen had always seen him attired, he wore two elaborately flowered ones, the under one trailing on the ground and the upper one descending only as far as the ankles. His shoes were big roomy things, with the points turned up like the blades of old-fashioned skates. Gold chains were hanging round his neck, the design and workmanship being similar to that of his bracelets. A jewelled *dah* was fixed in his outer skirt, and in his left hand he carried a lengthy palm-leaf fan. He beamed with delight when he saw the interest which his prisoners took in his fine clothes, and, without being asked to do so, turned round so that they might see the back of him.

"What is the meaning of this elaborate costume?" Harold enquired of Bah Pay.

"My lord, it is his Court dress," was the reply. "He is now going to take you to the Queen."

It struck the Englishmen that it was a very early hour for the Queen to receive people, but they made no comment, as they had learnt, from experience, that what was extraordinary to Europeans was considered perfectly natural to Orientals.

In five minutes or so the prisoners were dressed, and followed MOUNG KOON out into the road, where a large crowd had assembled to see them. But the soldiers, closing round the Englishmen, kept back the mob, and with much shouting and pushing got the prisoners safely to the palace.

The royal or Golden gate-keepers admitted MOUNG KOON and the three Englishmen within the outer wall, and conducted them straightway to a large courtyard. There they sat down and waited for five hours.

ARTHUR, HAROLD and GINGER VENN grew very impatient, but MOUNG KOON did not appear to consider that there was anything strange in being kept waiting for so long a time. He smoked many cheroots, and occasionally smiled pleasantly at his prisoners. He could not talk to them, as he had not brought BAH PAY with him, and he had no idea that GINGER VENN had a slight knowledge of Burmese.

The long period of waiting came to an end about mid-day, the Queen's willingness to receive him being communicated to MOUNG KOON by an official whose dress was even more elaborate than his own. MOUNG KOON was on his feet in a moment, and, by signs, intimated to ARTHUR, HAROLD and GINGER VENN that they were to follow him and do exactly as he did. So they followed him in single file through a long gorgeously-decorated passage, across a courtyard dotted with tiny fountains and, ascending a broad flight of red steps, reached the magnificent audience hall. Before entering they removed their shoes,

and left them in the charge of two menials who were keeping watch over a few hundred pairs of shoes and sandals of every Oriental pattern in existence.

The audience hall was crowded with men and women, every one of whom was attired in Court costume. It was a brilliant scene, marred somewhat by the cheroot fumes, for every man, woman and child was smoking the cheroot which never seems to be out of their mouths. At the end of the hall was a long white curtain, which prompted Arthur to whisper that there was going to be a magic-lantern show.

"Stash it," Harold answered; "Moung Koon is going to do something."

And as Harold spoke, Moung Koon went down on his knees and bent forward until his forehead touched the ground. Arthur, Harold and Ginger Venn followed his example, but they became rather tired of the performance when Moung Koon did it for the seventh time. Arthur was seized with a fascinating desire to vary and enliven the proceedings, so when he came to make his seventh obeisance he tucked his head well in, put out his hands and turned a somersault, his legs coming flat on Harold's back.

Harold's astonishment changed in a moment to anxiety for his friend, as he did not for a moment think it possible that the courtiers would overlook his tomfoolery. The same fear troubled Ginger Venn, but fortunately nothing unpleasant occurred. The people, men and women, believing

that Arthur had toppled over accidentally, laughed heartily at his mishap. Moungh Koon also laughed merrily, but he had a shrewd suspicion that Arthur's performance was not so involuntary as his countrymen imagined. Then he squatted down in the front row and signed to his prisoners to take up their position beside him. And there they sat for a quarter of an hour, staring at the white silk curtain.

Suddenly there was a blowing of trumpets, a beating of gongs and a banging of drums, and immediately every person in the hall fell flat on the ground. A minute later there was another blast of trumpets, and straightway the people sat up. While they were prostrate the curtain had been drawn aside, and now they beheld, seated on a magnificent throne, a pleasant-looking little woman—the Queen of Burma. On her head was a circlet of sparkling diamonds, and in the centre of it rose a long stiff loop of jet-black hair. Her long flowered skirt, her tight-armed jacket, and her shawl were all of the most costly silk that could be obtained. Her pointed shoes were studded with precious stones, and above them could be seen wide anklets of gold. In fact, she was almost smothered in wealth, for not only were her ears, fingers, wrists and ankles adorned with gold, rubies or diamonds, but her costume, from shoulders to feet, bristled and glittered with them. The only thing about her that looked common and inexpensive was the cheroot that she smoked, which did not differ in the slightest respect from the article enjoyed by the

lowliest of her husband's subjects. Arthur, Harold and Ginger Venn gazed at her with the greatest interest, knowing, that in spite of her pleasant appearance, she was responsible for the slaughter of almost numberless men, women and children. Human life was of no account to her, even though she professed to be a good Buddhist and worshipped daily at her favourite pagoda.

All the State officers who were not away at the war were assembled before her, but she had no thought for them just then, her gaze being fixed on the Englishmen. Ginger Venn's novel style of wearing his hair appeared to interest her greatly, and having feasted her eyes on him, she commanded Mounk Koon to advance and tell her all that he knew about the white men.

Mounk Koon, like the loyal subject that he was, crawled immediately on his hands and knees to the foot of the throne and, without a moment's hesitation, began the story of how he captured our friends. It was a wonderful story that he told and deserves to be recorded. Hearing, he declared, that an English army composed of ten thousand white men was advancing from Rangoon towards Ava, he collected five hundred men and gave battle to them. It was a fierce fight, but, although outnumbered, he succeeded in inflicting a crushing defeat on the enemy. He killed eight thousand of them, but the remainder fled and escaped. The three white prisoners whom he had captured were famous English war chiefs. The one with-hair-on-one-side-of-his-face-and-whiskers-on-the-

other had never before been defeated. He was a very great man in his own land.

When Mounk Koon had finished his fictitious account of his military achievements, the Queen complimented him highly on his success and promised to recommend him to the King for the command of the whole army. Hearing this, Mounk Koon, well pleased at the success which had crowned his untruthful statements, made obeisance and crawled backwards to the crowd, where he received the congratulations of his countrymen.

Mounk Koon's remarks concerning Ginger Venn had made the Queen still more interested in her quaint-looking prisoner, and she expressed her desire to speak to him.

"Who will be the 'lord of my words'?" she asked, and Mounk Koon, who had taken very good care to keep Bah Pay away, answered, "Mistress of our life, I have brought with me a Portuguese *kala* who can speak English. He will be proud to become the lord of your words."

"Then let him advance."

The Portuguese, an adventurer who had resided in Burma for some years, came forward immediately, and translated the Queen's questions, which were numerous and searching. After asking Ginger Venn how old he was and how many wives he had, the Queen enquired the number of battles he had won.

"None at all, your Majesty," he answered promptly, whereupon the Queen looked very surprised, and Mounk

Koon began to feel extremely nervous. But he soon recovered himself.

"The white *kala*," he explained, "is afraid that if he admits that he is a great war chief he will be killed."

The Queen regarded the explanation as perfectly satisfactory, being quite accustomed to seeing people terror-stricken in her presence. She told the interpreter to say to Ginger Venn that she would do him no harm, and was about to resume her questionings, when Arthur did something which attracted her attention. It was this. A big fly had settled on the ground a yard or two in front of Arthur, who, being tired of trying to sit comfortably and quietly in Oriental fashion, was seized with a desire to catch it. By the very simple means of closing his hand, as he moved it sharply a few inches above the fly, he caught it. For a minute or so he held it captive, and then, noticing that the Queen was watching him, he opened his hand ostentatiously and let the fly escape uninjured.

To Arthur's astonishment the Queen was as delighted with his performance as if she had been a mere child. She clapped her hands and pointed out another fly for him to catch. He secured it with the same ease that he had caught the other. Then she pointed to a third fly, and that, too, was caught.

"It is clever, it is clever," she declared, enthusiastically, and commanded Arthur to advance.

No sooner were the words out of the interpreter's mouth than Arthur jumped up and walked boldly to the foot of

the throne. The courtiers were horrified, and pointed to the ground. Arthur looked down, but, seeing nothing remarkable on the floor, glanced enquiringly at the courtiers, who then pointed to his elbows and knees. Immediately he scrutinised those joints, but, seeing nothing amiss with them, he shook his head in well-affected bewilderment. The Queen laughed heartily, and intimated to her zealous courtiers that Arthur was to be allowed to stand. "He is only a white *kala*," she said, apologetically, "and does not mean to be presumptuous."

But as a matter of fact that was exactly what Arthur did mean to be, and nothing but brute force would just then have compelled him to get down on all-fours.

It was fortunate, therefore, that the Queen was a bad judge of character, and that in her anxiety to ask questions she allowed Court rules to be broken. As it turned out, she asked one question only, but that was a startling one—"How many wives have you?"

Arthur did not answer hurriedly. First he fixed his eyes on the ground and remained in deep thought for a few moments. Afterwards he threw back his head and gazed at the roof. At length he spoke.

"Tell Her Majesty," he said, "that I cannot count them."

When the Queen heard this reply she uttered a cry of astonishment. Her husband, the King, had a few score wives, and she regarded that as only right and natural, but the idea of a young fellow like Arthur having more



Arthur bent down, and caught it.—P. 291.

than he could count was indeed startling. In fact, it seemed to make her incapable of asking any more questions. All she could do was to sit and gaze at Arthur in blank astonishment.

Then a fly settled at the foot of the throne, and she pointed at it. Arthur bent down and caught it in a moment.

This aroused the Queen, and calling forward some of her State officers, she had an animated conversation with them. Then one of them advanced to Arthur and put a gold chain around his neck. Arthur looked at it suspiciously.

"Are they going to strangle me?" he asked the interpreter.

"No, sir," the Portuguese replied. "That is a chain of office. The Queen has appointed you to be fly-catcher to the Court of Burma."

This totally unexpected honour nearly upset Arthur's gravity. To conceal his amusement he bowed low to the Queen, and before he again stood upright the trumpets sounded, the people prostrated themselves, the curtain was drawn and the audience was at an end.

CHAPTER XVIII

ARTHUR FIGHTS A BURMESE BULLY

"FOLLOW me," the Portuguese interpreter said to the three Englishmen, as soon as the audience was over, and led the way to a small hut situated about a hundred yards from the palace, but within the walls that shut off the royal dwelling from the rest of the city.

Standing outside the hut was Moung Koon in his gorgeous apparel, rolling a betel-chew and answering questions, with a modest air, concerning his tremendous defeat of the English.

When he saw Arthur, Harold and Ginger Venn, he waved to them to enter the hut, and then followed in company with the Portuguese, whom he instructed to say to the prisoners, "Now you are slaves, as I said that you would be, but no harm will be done to you. I am a very great man, and the Queen, in return for the services which I have rendered to her and to the King, has promised me that you shall not be made to do work such as other slaves do."

"Moung Koon, we thank you," Harold answered, politely, "and hope that you will always remain our friend."

"I will."

"I am very glad indeed to hear that. You can do us a friendly action to-day. My countrymen at Rangoon have many Burmese prisoners, and, if you send a messenger to our General, he will exchange three of them for us."

Moung Koon laughed heartily on hearing this suggestion.

"No, no," he said, when his merriment had subsided, "to do what you desire would be foolishness. The Queen has many Burmese slaves, and if she desired more she could have them, but she has only three white ones, and would not exchange them for one thousand brown ones. Let no more be said about that. Live here and be happy. All the food that you like shall be given to you, and you will have as little work to do as if you were virtuous *phoongyees*. You," pointing to Arthur, "will have most to do. Every day, when the Queen receives petitions, you must be present to catch the flies and set them free outside the building. Now I must depart."

He smiled pleasantly and retired, exclaiming to the guards posted around the Englishmen's hut. "Hi! hi! you rascals. Keep awake, and do not let the white *kalas* out of your sight; if you do, I'll cut your eyes out."

The Portuguese departed with Moung Koon, and the Englishmen were once more alone.

"Well," Harold exclaimed, "for slavery, our lot isn't bad."

"You're not the Court fly-catcher," Arthur interrupted, "or you wouldn't speak so cheerfully. High positions are full of worry."

"Perhaps your new duties will be a warning to you not to be playing the fool when you ought to be serious."

Arthur uttered a grunt which might have meant anything, and, rising, went and sat outside the hut. Harold and Ginger Venn followed him almost immediately, and the news that the white *kala* prisoners were on view soon became known to the officials, their families and servants, who resided within the walls that surrounded the palace. And no sooner was it known than a large crowd assembled to stare at them. Among the children who came was one little fellow with the toothache. His left hand was placed against his cheek, and tears were trickling down his face.

"Poor little chap," Harold murmured, and beckoned to him to come forward. Proud of being singled out for notice, the youngster advanced without the slightest hesitation, and stood close in front of Harold, who tenderly took his hand from his cheek and signed to him to open his mouth. The little fellow did so immediately, and pointed with one of his fingers to the tooth that was causing him the pain. It was a small thing, decayed and loose, and with a smile at the little sufferer, Harold put his thumb and first finger into his mouth, gripped the tooth, and had it out in a moment. Astonished at what had happened, the boy set up a yell, but quickly ceased crying when he found that the pain had gone.

In gratitude he prostrated himself before Harold, and then, rising to his feet, scampered off to tell the good news to his relations and friends. In a short time everyone within the palace walls knew of Harold's act, and, later in the day, Mounng Koon, carrying a gold chain in his hands, and accompanied by the Portuguese, came hurrying up to them. Mounng Koon placed the chain around Harold's neck, and at the same time the Portuguese announced that the Queen had appointed him "Tooth-puller to the Court of Burma."

"When do my duties begin?" Harold asked, gloomily, while Arthur rolled about the ground in delight.

"At once," the Portuguese answered, and departed forthwith. Almost at the same moment nearly a dozen men advanced, intimating by signs that they wanted teeth extracted.

"Good gracious," Harold exclaimed, in alarm, "whatever shall I do? I can't pull out their teeth."

"Have a try," Arthur suggested, "it will bring your muscle up finely."

"Oh, stash it, will you! But if you have any really sensible suggestion to make, let me hear it."

"Well, since you put it so politely, I have a suggestion to make. There's a long, cruel-looking knife in that pigsty where we reside. Get it, and let the people understand that you intend to cut their teeth out; that will reduce the number of applicants very quickly."

"A good idea," Harold declared, and hurried into the

hut to fetch the knife. It was a small-handled thing, with a long, narrow blade worn away to a sharp point.

When Harold came out, grasping the knife in his hand, he beckoned to the men who wanted their teeth extracted to advance. But the sight of the knife had apparently cured them completely of toothache, for not one approached the Englishmen. Some, by signs, enquired of Harold what he intended to do with the knife, whereupon he answered, by means of a graphic gesture, that he purposed digging out their teeth with it. That confirmed the fears of the people with toothache, and, turning about, they ran away.

"Now, Harold," Arthur said, swelling with dignity, "perhaps you will be good enough to admit that I do make sensible suggestions sometimes."

"You've made one useful suggestion," Harold replied, "and I'm very much obliged to you for it. I hope that you'll be encouraged now to make others."

"Look here, Mr. Tooth-Puller, if you don't dry up talking to me like a father, I'll expose your incompetency, and get your chain of office taken away. You can't retaliate, because I *can* catch flies and you can't extract teeth. By the bye, Ginger Venn, I wonder what they'll appoint you to be."

"I hope they won't appoint me anything, sir," Ginger Venn declared, feelingly. "When a man's been a heathen god for two years, all he wants to be is a plain man, and 'ave no fuss made about him."

"You'll never be that while you're in Ava," Harold assured him, "for the people are fully convinced that you are a great general."

"The Duke of Wellington, sir?"

"No, General Godwin, I fancy."

Ginger Venn's face fell, for, in spite of what he had said about wishing to be a plain man, the idea of being mistaken for the Duke of Wellington was one that pleased him. But to be thought General Godwin did not excite him in the least, for he knew nothing of that soldier, although he commanded the troops which captured Rangoon.

Whether or not the Burmese did imagine Ginger Venn to be General Godwin, it is impossible to say, but the Burmese believe the most extraordinary tales. The more unlikely they are, the more they appeal to their credibility. At any rate, later in the day, Mounk Koon paid a visit to his prisoners, and promised Ginger Venn that, if he would take command of a Burmese regiment, and proceed down the river with him to fight the English, he would be raised to a high position, have as many wives given to him as he wanted, and for salary have several villages placed at his disposal. These villages he could tax as heavily as he liked.

"You dirty, sneaking, cowardly, grinning, brown-faced monkey," Ginger Venn shouted, in a passion, "if you ask me that again I'll give you the biggest thrashing that ever you had in your life. So don't you forget it."

"Bravo! Ginger Venn," Arthur exclaimed in great delight, patting the ex-god on the back. "By Jingo, you couldn't have answered him better if you'd been a sailor. What do you say, Harold?"

Harold hesitated. He was quite as patriotic as his companions, but he prided himself, in secret, on being somewhat of a diplomatist, and able to keep his feelings under control. A braver lad did not exist, but he had schooled himself to the fact that, to imperil, unnecessarily, his own life, or that of any of his men, was a serious offence.

"Certainly, it was a blackguardly thing for Mounk Koon to suggest," he admitted, at length, "but that did not justify Ginger Venn in abusing him and threatening him with violence. It is our duty, Arthur, to get back to the frigate, but if Ginger Venn speaks out again as he did just now we never shall, that's quite certain. Perhaps his threats have settled our fate [already]."

But, as it happened, Mounk Koon never had the faintest idea that he had been threatened, as the Portuguese interpreter, for some reason of his own, simply told him that Ginger Venn declined his proposal. Whereupon he smiled pleasantly and departed. And that was the last time that ever they saw him, for he started that night to the front with reinforcements.

After the first twelve days of their captivity at Ava, Arthur, Harold and Ginger Venn began to tire of Court life. Now that the novelty had worn off, the proceedings

of the Queen and her courtiers appeared tame and uninteresting, and were only saved from dulness by Arthur's pranks. For some days he caught flies with his usual smartness, and rather enjoyed the fun, but then the sport began to pall on him.

"The wretched flies enjoy being caught," he declared, at last, "for they know that I mustn't squash them, and come back directly after I have turned them out. I begin to recognise some of them. I beg your pardon, Harold, what was that you said?"

But Harold, who was in very low spirits just then, walked away without answering.

"Poor fellow," Arthur said to Ginger Venn, "he wants cheering up. A good laugh would do him good. He shall have one if I can manage it."

What Arthur considered a good opportunity for raising a laugh occurred as soon as they entered the audience hall. When the time for making obeisance came, there was a big fat Burman immediately in front of the Englishmen. His feet were unslipperd, and the soles exposed temptingly. Arthur no sooner noticed them than he stretched out both hands and tickled the sole of each foot. With a cry of alarm the fat Burman jumped up, only to remember that he ought to be prostrate. So down he tried to go, but tripped over a prostrate countryman and went sprawling forward, his head catching the Queen's Spittoon-bearer in the middle of his stomach. At that moment the curtain went up.

"Seize the disrespectful dog," the Queen shrieked, pointing to the fat man. "Let his head and feet be cut off."

The executioners, who were always near at hand, advanced promptly, but the fat man saw the hated "spotted faces," and made a frantic effort to escape. It was a waste of energy, however, for in a minute he was seized and dragged away for execution.

Arthur, who, of course, had never anticipated any such disastrous ending to his practical joke, was horror-stricken and full of remorse. He ran to the Portuguese interpreter, and, telling him, in excited tones, what he had done, begged him to ask the Queen to spare the Burman's life. And when the Queen heard the true reason of the fat man's uncourtly behaviour she laughed heartily, and commanded that the condemned man should be pardoned and set free. Naturally Arthur was delighted with the success of his appeal, and thanked the Queen earnestly for her promptitude in preventing an act of injustice.

The Queen smiled when Arthur's impassioned thanks were interpreted to her, and replied, "Tell the young *kala* with more wives than he can count, that although I have set the innocent man free, I have not punished the guilty one."

The "spotted faces" now drew closer to Arthur, waiting for the word to seize him and drag him away to his death. But the word was never uttered. The Queen of Burma

had taken a motherly liking to her youngest white slave, and had not the slightest intention of punishing him for his escapade. She only wanted to give him a shock, and, having done that, she waved the executioners away.

Then she called Arthur's attention to three flies impudently and irreverently playing about on the placid features of an image of Buddha. Arthur caught them one by one, and his breach of Court etiquette was forgiven. But it was not forgotten by everybody, or forgiven either. The fat man's son was the champion boxer of Ava, and being also a great bully, he determined to make Arthur regret upsetting his portly father's dignity. He followed him on his way back to his house, and, seeing an opportunity, rushed forward and struck Arthur a heavy blow on the chest, calling him at the same time a pig—the most insulting expression that he knew. Naturally Arthur was astonished, for he was unaware of the fact that the fat man and the champion boxer were father and son, but he did not endeavour to guess the cause of the assault. There would be time enough to do that when he had avenged it. So, clenching his fists, he rushed at the champion, but did not reach him, for the men appointed to keep a constant watch over the Englishmen seized Arthur and bore him off, in spite of his protestations, to his hut.

"I'll pay him out some time or other," Arthur vowed, as he talked the matter over with Harold and Ginger Venn.

"You'd better not," Harold said. "His friends will, of

course, take his side, and then we shall have a lot of enemies. Try to ignore the fellow."

But to do that they soon saw was impossible, for, whenever they left their hut, the champion boxer was almost invariably waiting outside to call Arthur a pig, a dog, or a coward. And one day, in the audience hall, the champion kicked Arthur viciously in the back, just as the white curtain was about to be drawn aside.

Arthur could do nothing then, although he was boiling over with indignation. Much as he yearned for liberty, his greatest desire was to meet the champion boxer face to face and fight him. No doubt he would be beaten, for the champion was a burly, athletic fellow, but it would be better to fight and be defeated than to submit tamely to his insults. And in the hope of having eventually an encounter with him, Arthur watched, whenever he had an opportunity, how the Burmese boxed and acquired a knowledge of their attack and defence. When he had been a prisoner in Ava about a fortnight, a splendid opportunity for studying their tactics occurred.

The Portuguese interpreter, having noticed Arthur's interest in boxing, invited him and Harold and Ginger Venn to witness a match to be fought out, that day, at the other side of the palace. The Englishmen accepted the invitation readily, and started off at once, accompanied by their custodians, two hundred in number and armed to the teeth. They arrived at the spot just as the match was about to commence. Two strong-looking Burmans, naked,

with the exception of a loin-cloth, and their long black hair hanging down their backs, were dancing about the ring in a most extraordinary fashion. Now and again they would stop short and face each other, advancing the left arm and smacking the biceps of it with the right hand. That is the Burmese way of telling a fellow that you don't care a rap for him and challenging him to fight. Having smacked their biceps several times, the two men started dancing about again, yelling in a most ear-piercing fashion. And the bandsmen getting excited, made their instruments produce even more unearthly music than usual. Occasionally the boxers varied the proceedings by turning somersaults. When they had danced, shouted and threatened each other for about five minutes, they sat down in the ring and had a short rest, preparatory to beginning the fight.

At a word from the judge the men stood up and faced each other, standing English fashion, with the exception that the hands were not clenched but open. This surprised the Englishmen, but they soon discovered that the hands were not clenched because they by no means played the chief part in such contests. Kicking was permissible, and, in fact, the feet were used much more than the hands. Both men kicked each other several times in the face, neck and body. Some of the kicks were simply marvellous, and the Englishmen frequently burst into loud applause. But after all, the match did not last very long, for one man was unmistakably

superior to the other, and, getting his opponent's head into chancery, he began to pommel it, not with his fist, but with his knee. For two or three moments the unfortunate man struggled to get free, but finding that he could not do so he shouted out that he was defeated.

The conqueror was congratulated heartily by his friends, but scarcely had he left the ring, when Arthur's enemy, the champion boxer of Ava, jumped into it and shouted a challenge to fight any one. But, although he offered a general challenge, his eyes were fixed on Arthur, and his left hand was pointed at him as he smacked his biceps. It was a challenge to Arthur, and was accepted by the midshipman without a moment's hesitation. Before Harold and Ginger Venn knew what his intentions were, Arthur was struggling through the crowd to reach the ring. The next minute he was in it, smacking his biceps defiantly at the champion. The Burmese onlookers were astonished into silence by Arthur's unexpected appearance in the ring, and discussed among themselves whether he should be allowed to fight. He had become a favourite with most of the people within the palace walls, and they did not want to see him receive a thrashing. That he would do so, if he persisted in fighting, they felt assured, for the champion was a big fellow for a Burman, and quite two inches taller than Arthur. But, while the Burmese were discussing whether the fight ought to be prevented, it started. The champion was full of confidence when Arthur squared up to him, but

Arthur looked very serious, and felt so, for he knew that he had a tough bit of work to go through. No thought of shirking it ever entered his head. All he was anxious about was that he might make a stand that would be creditable to himself and friends.

"Don't be in a hurry, sir," Ginger Venn called out, "and keep your eye on his feet."

Arthur nodded his head. Those were the tactics he had himself decided upon adopting, and it was reassuring to find that Ginger Venn approved of them. So he sparred cautiously, and, for a few moments, avoided the blows which the champion aimed at him with hands and feet. His agility enraged the Burman, for he had vowed to make Arthur admit that he was beaten before thirty blows had been struck. Therefore he rushed at him, and, although he received some stinging blows on coming to close quarters, caught hold of him, with the intention of getting his head into chancery. But Arthur was prepared for that, and, do what the champion might, he could not achieve his desire. Then he tried to throw Arthur, and was foiled again, for Arthur was a very good wrestler and had distinguished himself at home in many exciting contests with the lads of the district. When the Burmese champion started wrestling, Arthur thrilled with delight, for he felt pretty sure that his opponent would be unprepared for that special throw of his which had enabled him to come victorious out of many a tough contest. And unprepared the champion was, for in less

than a minute after catching hold of Arthur, he found himself flung, heavily, flat on his back.

"Bravo! bravo!" Ginger Venn shouted, in great delight, but Harold, who was equally pleased, made no sign of rejoicing, for fear that it might arouse the anger of the Burmese. As long as they were prisoners, it was his desire to live on good terms with all the people.

"Another throw like that will settle him, sir," Ginger Venn sang out to Arthur, who certainly intended to repeat his performance if he had the opportunity. But he did not have it, for the champion, after he had picked himself up, showed no inclination whatever to indulge in any more wrestling. He determined to rely on his kicking, and on three separate occasions, when Arthur tried to catch hold of him, he drove the midshipman back with a kick that sent him staggering. Arthur now saw that, if he were to win the fight, he would have to resume his former tactics of trying to tire the champion by tempting him to kick, and then jumping aside to avoid his blows. For a time that plan succeeded, but as soon as the Burman found that he was wasting his strength to no purpose, he, too, changed his tactics. He clenched his fists and rushed at Arthur furiously, but was met with a stinging blow on the cheek which pulled him up quickly and made him cautious. And now, for the first time since the fight began, the two men sparred for several moments without striking a blow. Then Arthur saw his opportunity, and shot out his left fist at his opponent's body, but the



He drove the midshipman back with a kick that sent him staggering.

blow did not reach its mark, for the champion escaped it by giving a tremendous jump forward into the air, and as he jumped he kicked out with his right foot and landed it full in Arthur's face. Arthur fell like a log flat on his back. In an instant Ginger Venn and Harold jumped into the ring to see if he were hurt seriously, but before they reached him he was on his feet again.

"All right, Harold! All right, Ginger Venn!" he said, with a smile on his swollen face. "I'm not beaten yet. Clear out, like good fellows."

Greatly pleased at finding there was nothing much the matter with him, Harold and Ginger Venn hurriedly quitted the ring and resumed their seats.

Again the men sparred for a few moments. Then Arthur, to Ginger Venn's horror, struck out in exactly the same way as before. But the result was not as on the former occasion, for, although the champion did jump into the air and shoot out his right foot, Arthur was looking out for that kick and avoided it by dropping quickly on his knees. Then, springing up again, he ran at the champion before he had time to steady himself after his futile jump, and, landing him two rat-tat blows on the face, sent him backwards on to the ground.

Moving back a step or two, Arthur waited for the champion to rise and resume the fight. But the moments swelled into a minute, and still the man did not rise, but lay mumbling something which Arthur could not under-

stand. But others understood, and among them the Portuguese interpreter.

"He gives in," he explained, in a loud voice. "He is defeated."

Ginger Venn greeted the announcement with a wild "Hip, hip, hoorah!" and Harold, discarding for once all thoughts of caution and diplomacy, joined in the cheer. It was, of course, only natural that the two Englishmen should rejoice at the victory of their warm-hearted, impetuous young friend, but it was a great surprise for them when the Burmese, with scarcely an exception, added their own shouts of delight to the English cheers. They were indeed frantic with glee, for the bully, whom they had deemed invincible, had been beaten before their own eyes. His reputation was gone, and many who had feared him before, and had borne his blows without daring to retaliate, would be able to taunt him with his humiliation. Some would attempt to repeat the thrashing which Arthur had given him. So enthusiastic did the crowd become, and so anxious were the people to congratulate Arthur, that the men appointed to keep guard over the Englishmen became frightened that they might escape in the excitement, and, to prevent such a possibility, they closed round them and marched them back to their house.

CHAPTER XIX

THE ESCAPE FROM AVA

ON the day following the fight there was scarcely a bruise or scratch to be seen on Arthur's face, so thoroughly had Harold and Ginger Venn attended to him immediately after his victory. His comfort was, of course, their chief thought, but at the same time they were desirous of removing all trace of what punishment he had received, so that when the ex-champion next met him—Ginger Venn insisted that Arthur was now champion of Ava—he might see what little damage he had done. But, as it happened, the ex-champion saw neither of the Englishmen again, for he quitted Ava a few hours after the fight, and never returned. After his departure, life at Ava was more easy for the Englishmen. All the people were exceedingly kind to them, and but for the posse of soldiers, who never ceased to keep watch over them, they might have been free. They went to the pagoda, when the Queen rode there in great state, and they were taken to see native dancers, buffalo fights, boat races, and other amusements dear to the Burmese. At the Court

their presence had ceased to attract much notice, and Arthur's fly-catching proficiency was no longer regarded as something marvellous. The only thing that continued to interest them was Ginger Venn's style of wearing his hair. A few men were so pleased with it that they endeavoured to train theirs in the same fashion, and, as far as the hair on top of the head was concerned, were successful. But the whiskers were a horrible failure, for a Burman's face, for some reason or other, is not a very fertile soil, and there was scarcely any difference between the shaven and the unshaven side.

Such things amused the Englishmen, who could have been very happy in their captivity but for their intense yearning to get back to their countrymen. Whenever they were alone they talked in undertones of escape, but, although they plotted and planned for hours at a stretch, they could not decide upon any action which seemed likely to be crowned with success.

"If we had Bah Pay here," Ginger Venn said, on one occasion, "we might try bribing some of the people to help us to escape. He could sound them, and work up to the subject without scaring them. But it ain't no good trying to bribe a fellow, when you can't speak his lingo and he can't understand yours. I wonder what has become of Bah Pay. I've asked that Portuguese cove lots of times, but he pretends that he doesn't know."

"I quite forgot the Portuguese interpreter," Arthur exclaimed. "Shall we try to bribe him?"

"It would be a waste of time," Harold declared. "These European chaps who hang about Eastern courts are usually rascals who have fled from their own country to escape punishment for crimes which they have committed. And, to win the favour of their masters, they incite them to persecute and ill-treat any other Europeans who arrive in their dominions."

"Well, sir, I don't believe this Portuguese interpreter cove has done that," Ginger Venn joined in. "He isn't very affable, but I don't think, sir, somehow or other, that he'd do us a bad turn."

"He may be an exception to the rule," Harold admitted, "but, nevertheless, I don't think that it would be wise to speak to him about helping us to escape."

Harold's advice was taken, for Arthur and Ginger Venn regarded their companion as a much wiser person than themselves, and, indeed, had found, almost invariably, that he had good reasons for everything that he said or did.

But although the prisoners did not make overtures to the Portuguese interpreter, they did not cease to discuss and plan, among themselves, the best way to escape. Many of their plans could have been carried out successfully had it not been for the soldiers, who, day and night, surrounded their hut and accompanied them wherever they went. If they could have escaped from those vigilant custodians, they would soon have been free. It, therefore, became their great desire to devise some means by which their warders' attention might be drawn

from them for a brief space. Five minutes, they calculated, would give them sufficient start for their escape to have a prospect of ending in liberty. How to obtain these few minutes' grace was the subject they discussed one night, long after the villagers were sleeping soundly, and when the voices of the prisoners' custodians alone broke the stillness of the night.

"It's no good," Arthur declared, at last. "Here we've been plotting and planning for three hours and haven't decided anything. I'm tired out and want to get some sleep. You two may sit up talking if you like, but I'm off to the land of Nod. Perhaps I shall discover, in my dreams, how to make an earthquake. By Jove, an earthquake would be grand. It would swallow up all those fellows outside."

"If it did that, it would swallow us as well," Harold remarked, truthfully.

"Oh, bother! you're enough to drive a fellow mad. Whenever I suggest anything, you always criticise it and cut it up."

"Well, Arthur, that is not my fault, it is yours. You should make more sensible suggestions."

"Bosh! Go to sleep. Good-night."

"Good-night!" Harold and Ginger Venn answered, and soon all three were enjoying as sound a sleep as any man could desire. But shortly before daybreak they awoke suddenly, startled from their sleep by the most tremendous uproar that they had ever heard. Men shouted, women

shrieked, children screamed, drums were beaten, trumpets blown and bells rung.

"What does it all mean?" Arthur asked, but without waiting for an answer, flung off his blanket and ran to the door to peep out. Harold and Ginger Venn followed his example, and the sight that all three witnessed was one that they never forgot. An excited crowd, bearing aloft lighted torches, was swaying to and fro brandishing *dahs*, spears and various other weapons. The men were defiant, but the women shrieked in terror, and the children clinging to their skirts screamed at the unusual sight of their mothers in tears. The palace was a blaze of light, and the high officers of State were struggling through the crowd to reach it, evidently in obedience to the Queen's commands.

"There are strangers within the palace walls," Harold said in wonderment.

"And a good lot of them, too," Arthur replied. "Hundreds of them, I should think."

"But how about our keepers? Are they still on duty? I can't distinguish them."

"Oh yes, they're there," Arthur answered, "but they're jabbering away to the people like wildfire. Can't we find out what the excitement is about? I am dying to know."

"We shall know before long," Harold assured him. "Let us dress quickly and be ready for anything that happens. We may have a chance of escaping."

In two or three minutes the Englishmen were dressed and again peeping out at the door.

"Look over there," Ginger Venn exclaimed, almost immediately. "Some of our guardians have mixed with the crowd. Now is our time to escape, young gentlemen. Are you ready?"

"Aye, aye," the midshipmen answered, and filed out after Ginger Venn, who, of his own accord, assumed command. He had an idea that they were on a dangerous job, and was determined to be the first to meet whatever threatened them.

"The young gentlemen," he said to himself, "are regular young bull-dogs, and will fight anything that comes in their way. But if I can help it, there shan't be any fighting at all."

So he crept cautiously from the shadow of the hut to the shadow of the trees, Arthur and Harold following stealthily in his wake. So far they had escaped notice, and their spirits rose higher with every few yards that they covered. Then they had to quit the sheltering shadow of the trees, and cross a wide open space which lay between them and the spot vacated by their guardians.

"We'd better walk boldly across," Harold suggested, "and then possibly we shall be mistaken for Burmans. The darkness and the excited state of the people will make our chances of being discovered much less."

"Very good, sir," Ginger Venn answered; "but we

must not talk any more, in case any of the people should hear us. If they did, they'd know at once that we were foreigners."

As Ginger Venn finished speaking, he stepped out from under the trees and began to cross the open space. When he had gone a few yards, Arthur followed his example, and, about half-a-minute later, Harold brought up the rear. It was an exciting time for the three men, and each had an almost irresistible longing to make a run for liberty. Walking was such slow work when every yard seemed to be ten times its real length. Nevertheless, they continued to walk deliberately, with their eyes fixed eagerly on the spot where they hoped to mingle with the crowd, and, in the confusion caused by the, to them, unaccountable excitement, escape from the palace enclosure.

Twenty more yards and the crowd would be reached. The men who had guarded them so long and unremittingly were thinking of other things now, alternately asking questions of the soldiers who had arrived during the night, and breaking forth into loud shouts of defiance.

Ten more yards! But only one of them had been traversed when a loud warning shout, uttered by one watchful guard, called his comrades back to their duty. With threatening yells and ominous raisings of their loaded rifles, they returned to their posts and barred the prisoners' escape.

Bitterly disappointed, Arthur, Harold and Ginger Venn halted, undecided what to do. To proceed another yard would mean death for them. To retrace their steps would mean submitting quietly to their captivity, and they knew, perfectly well, that after their attempt to escape they would be guarded more closely than ever. What should they do? What could they do? But they were not given time to ask each other these questions, for the men who had entered the palace enclosure during the night had discovered who they were, and strove to pass the guards and kill them. They did not succeed in accomplishing their desire, for the Englishmen's custodians were now on their mettle and determined to do their duty. They vowed that the first person who attempted to break through the cordon would be shot on the spot, and the threat had the desired effect. But foiled in that attempt, the new-comers seized sticks and stones, and, getting on high ground, pelted the Englishmen vigorously.

Fortunately, the wounds which our friends received were only slight, but the shower of missiles grew thicker every moment, and soon shots were fired.

"There's no help for it," Harold said, gloomily. "We must return to our quarters. Run for it."

He set the example by starting off at a trot towards their hut, and Arthur and Ginger Venn did not lag behind. And as they ran the people yelled furiously, and fired shot after shot at them. Some bullets whistled perilously near

to them, but, fortunately, they succeeded in reaching their hut without receiving any further hurt.

"What does it all mean?" Arthur exclaimed, as they bathed and dressed their wounds in their dimly-lighted hut. "Hark! how the scoundrels are yelling. If they are reinforced they'll overwhelm our warders, and then I suppose the end will come."

"I'm afraid so," Harold answered, calmly.

"Don't talk about that, sir," Ginger Venn joined in, cheerfully. "We've been in some very tight corners, and got out of them all right, so why shouldn't we get out of this one? Let's keep our peckers up, young gentlemen, and we'll get back to old England yet."

"You're a little too hopeful, I'm afraid, Ginger Venn," Harold said, quietly.

"Well, sir, if you think that, what are you binding up your wound for? Isn't it a waste of trouble if you're certain that we are going to be killed soon? I'm binding mine up because I feel certain that we shall escape. Is there anything to eat in the place?"

"There's plenty of rice," Arthur said; "and now that you talk about food, I'm bothered if I don't feel jolly hungry. Come on, Harold, let us have a good feed on rice and fruit."

Ginger Venn got out the food, and the three then sat down on the floor to partake of it. They ate heartily, and their spirits revived long before the meal was finished.

"Hallo! the shouting has ceased," Arthur exclaimed,

as they lighted their cheroots. He went to the door and peeped out.

"There are nine men coming towards us," he said, looking round, and Harold and Ginger Venn hurried to see if they could distinguish who the visitors were.

"The Portuguese cove is one of them," Ginger Venn declared, "but I can't recognise the others."

"They're Burmans, and they're armed," Arthur said quietly. "They've got axes and *dahs* and daggers."

"Can you see their faces?" Harold enquired, with just a slight quiver in his voice.

"No, sir, we can't," Ginger Venn answered, briskly. "Come away, young gentlemen, and let's spread out what food we've got for our visitors. We mustn't let them think that because we're Englishmen we don't know how to receive guests."

As he spoke, Ginger Venn drew his young friends away from the door, and busied himself in placing what remained of their rice and fruit on the low table at which they usually dined. Arthur and Harold assisted, but everything was done in silence, for their ears were strained to catch the footsteps of the approaching men. Soon they heard them walking the plank that led from the roadway to their hut. They turned and looked at the door, and there, standing in the entrance, was the Portuguese interpreter.

"Good-evening, gentlemen," he exclaimed, cheerfully, as he entered, but received no reply, for the Englishmen's

eyes were fixed on the eight horrible-looking men who followed him. They were "spotted faces"—executioners.

"It's all up with us," Arthur exclaimed, and now that he knew the worst he was quite as lively as ever. "If they'd give each of us one of their many weapons, we might make a fight for it. But they won't."

Harold was calm and dignified, but Ginger Venn was utterly unconcerned at the fate that awaited them.

"Before you murder us," Harold said, scornfully, to the Portuguese interpreter, "perhaps you will tell us why we are to die. We have done nothing that we know of, since we have been prisoners, to arouse the anger of the Queen and her subjects."

"We must not waste time in talking," the interpreter answered. "I have come to help you to escape."

The Englishmen, scarcely daring to hope that he spoke the truth, looked at him searchingly, and he met their gaze with a smile.

"If you mean what you say, why have you brought those coves?" Ginger Venn enquired, nodding towards the "spotted faces."

"They are bribed," the interpreter replied. "The people think that they have come to kill you, but they have come to assist you. Three of them are not 'spotted faces' at all. The circles on their faces are not tattooed; they have been made by me. I will wash them off, and make others like them on your faces. Then you will put on their clothes, and take up their axes and *dahs* and

daggers, and pass out, with the five real 'spotted faces,' to your friend Bah Pay, who is waiting for you at the river-side."

"By Jove!" Arthur exclaimed, "that's a grand idea. But why are *you* helping us? We've never been particularly friendly with you."

"Bah Pay is my friend. Once, when I was in Rangoon, he nursed me while I was ill. He has asked me to do what I have told you we shall do. If he had asked me to do more than that I would have done it. But now we must work hard. That gentleman," pointing to Ginger Venn, "must have his hair cut and his beard shaved. One of these men will do it."

He beckoned one of the "spotted faces," and, dipping his hand into a bowl of water that happened to be near by, quickly wiped the painted circles from the man's face.

"Now you see that he is not a 'spotted face,'" he said, gaily, to Ginger Venn. "He is a barber, and will soon remove your hair and beard."

The barber now took out his razor, soap and brush, and by the flickering light of the torches, which two of the real "spotted faces" held aloft, began to shave Ginger Venn's beard.

The interpreter at the same time started work on Harold's face, painting circles such as were tattooed on the faces of Burmese executioners. He did them very rapidly, and in less than two minutes Harold looked as villainous as the worst of the executioners standing by. Then he

turned his attention to Arthur, and speedily made him as hideous an object as his friend.

"It is very fortunate, gentlemen," the interpreter said, as he surveyed his work with great satisfaction, "that you are so tanned by the sun and exposure. Your skin is quite as brown as thousands of Burmans'. If I had had to stain your faces, it would have taken me a very long while."

By this time two of the sham executioners had removed their clothes and handed them over to Arthur and Harold, who attired themselves in them without the slightest hesitation.

The interpreter was now waiting for the barber to finish shaving Ginger Venn's face, but, fortunately, he had not to wait more than a minute. The barber was most expeditious, and the moment he had removed the whiskers, beard and moustache he started cutting away at the long-hair side of Ginger Venn's head. And while he was cutting off big lumps of hair, the interpreter was busy painting circles on his face.

"Now you're finished," the interpreter exclaimed, a minute or so later. "Put on those clothes, and we'll start at once."

Ginger Venn dressed more quickly than ever he had done before.

Then the sham executioners, their faces washed and wearing the Englishmen's turbans and loin-cloths, handed over their weapons to the prisoners, who saw with horror that blood was dripping from them.

"It is only a dog's blood," the interpreter explained, on seeing their surprise. "I knew that it would look suspicious if we came out of this place with no blood on our weapons, so I enticed a pariah dog to follow us. See, there is his body. Now we must set light to the house, so that the people will never know that you were not killed."

"But how will those men escape?" Harold enquired anxiously, looking towards the sham executioners.

"As we leave the place they will drop through that hole"—he pointed to some of the flooring that had been torn up—"on to the ground. If any one sees them and asks what they have been doing, they will reply that they have been watching the 'spotted faces' kill the white *kalas*. They will be safe."

Then the interpreter said to the men with the torches, "Set light," and in a moment the place was in flames, for bamboo and mat huts burn quickly as if they were soaked in paraffin. And as the flames leapt up the walls and licked the roof the interpreter marched out of the hut, followed by the eight "spotted faces." When they had crossed the plank they walked straight towards the people, Arthur, Harold and Ginger Venn hoping and praying that they might not be discovered. They saw soon that there was little fear of that happening, for as they approached the crowd it opened out to give them ample room—more than was required, in fact—to pass through. Men struggled and fought with each other in their eagerness to get as



The interpreter marched out of the hut, followed by the eight "spotted faces."

far as possible from the "spotted faces," whom all Burmans loathed and shunned.

So through the crowd and out at the palace gates the interpreter and the eight "spotted faces" passed quickly, not a soul imagining that some of them were not what they seemed to be.

"Now we are going to the river," the interpreter whispered to the Englishmen. "Bah Pay has a boat waiting for you. And I am going to Rangoon with you."

He spoke in a tone which implied that getting to Rangoon was now quite practicable, and his confidence cheered the Englishmen almost to the point of shouting "Hurrah!"

On and on through the town they went, and not a soul—man, woman, or child—stopped to look twice at them. Their road was clear wherever they went, and the interpreter and the Englishmen were very thankful that it was. At last they reached the river, and beheld Bah Pay sitting on the bank awaiting their arrival. He saw them almost as soon as they saw him, and, jumping up, ran quickly towards them. He gave one searching look at the executioners, and discovered Arthur and Harold at once.

"My lords," he exclaimed, earnestly, as he shook hands with them, "I am very glad indeed to see you again, but where is Ginger Venn?"

Arthur pointed to him, but the loss of his whiskers and

long hair had made such a change in his appearance that Bah Pay failed to recognise him.

"Oh, it's me right enough," Ginger Venn assured him, stepping forward, and, as soon as he spoke, Bah Pay laughed and shook hands with him.

"The boat is waiting for us," Bah Pay said, turning to the interpreter and giving him some money tied up in a cloth. "Pay the 'spotted faces,' and then hurry after us."

"My lords," he continued, giving the Englishmen a cloth and pointing to the river, "remove quickly the vile marks from your faces." And when they had done so, he exclaimed, "My lords, follow me."

They started off quickly, and in less than two minutes reached a spot where the jungle grew thick close down to the water's edge. Bah Pay gave a low whistle, and it was answered by a similar one. Then he pushed aside some tangled plants that barred their way, and they beheld a creek, and tied up in it a fine twenty-oared Burmese barge. Every man was at his oar, but the Eurasian in command of them stood on shore awaiting the Englishmen's arrival.

"Bon jour," he said, for that was all he knew of his father's language, and was quite delighted when he saw that the Englishmen understood him.

"My lords," Bah Pay said, briskly, "take your seats under that awning. You will not have to wait long, for I can hear the Portuguese coming."

And almost as he finished speaking, the interpreter broke through the jungle and joined them.

"Jump in," Bah Pay commanded, and set the example himself, the interpreter and the Eurasian following immediately. Then, quickly but silently, the barge was shoved off, and the rowers setting to work with a will, it shot out into the river, and started on the long journey to Rangoon.

"My lords," Bah Pay said, as soon as they were clear of the creek, "you are free once more. Everything has turned out better even than I expected. I am very happy."

"And so are we," Harold answered. "We are happy, and we are very grateful indeed to you for bringing about our escape. We had begun to think that you had deserted us."

"My lord, I was afraid that you would think that. I will tell you now why I did not send any message to you. When we arrived at Ava, MOUNG KOON would not let me pass within the palace walls. I was very angry, but when I found that my Portuguese friend was MOUNG KOON's interpreter, I thought that I could be of more use to you outside. Every day my friend told me all that you did, and every day we tried to think of some way of aiding you to escape. But, until yesterday, we could think of nothing that we believed could be successful. Yesterday, at midday, two men from the King's army arrived at Ava with the news that the white *kalas* had

won many battles, and were coming up the river. Moun-
g Koon, overcome by fear, had left his army, and where he
had gone no man knew. The King's army, which had lost
three-quarters of its men, was hurrying back to Ava. My
lords, my countrymen were very sad, and so was I. But
I was sad because I knew that when the King's men
returned they would have you killed. For one hour I sat
thinking, and at last I thought of a plan that pleased me.
You know what that plan was, for you have seen it
carried out, and it has set you free."

"But how did you manage to prevail on the 'spotted
faces' to assist you?" Arthur queried. "I thought that
they enjoyed killing their fellow-creatures and disliked
being robbed of their victims."

"My lord, that is quite a mistake. The poor fellows
did not become 'spotted faces' of their own free will.
They have committed crimes themselves, and have been
sentenced to become 'spotted faces' instead of being
killed. My lord, they say that it would have been better
for them if they had been killed, for it is no pleasure for
them to live. Their countrymen hate them, and shun
them as if they had some loathsome disease. But I have
spoken to many of them daily, for the hut in which I
lived while you were within the palace walls was close to
theirs. Therefore, when I told them what I wanted them
to do they promised readily; and they did it. The men
who were not 'spotted faces' my Portuguese friend pro-
cured. He has helped us very much indeed. Without

him I should never have been able to carry out my plans."

Once more the Englishmen thanked Bah Pay and the Portuguese interpreter, and neither man made any attempt to conceal the pleasure which their thanks afforded him.

For two days and two nights the barge sped down the mighty Irrawaddy, resting occasionally for a few hours in some quiet creek away from any sign of human beings. Now and again they passed the barges of wealthy Burmans bearing them and their wives and families to Ava for safety. Whenever such boats came in sight the Europeans lay down in the barge, so that there might be no fear of their being recognised as white men. The majority of the boats proceeding Ava-wards took no notice of the fugitives' barge, but now and again some well-meaning man would shout to them. "Turn back, turn back! The white *kalas* are coming."

And this warning naturally raised the spirits of the Englishmen.

At noon on the fourth day of their flight, while the barge was tied up in a tree-shaded part of the river, Harold espied a ten-oared Burmese boat travelling down stream.

"It's flying a flag of defiance," he declared, excitedly. "We must have it."

Bah Pay and the Portuguese interpreter endeavoured to dissuade him from interfering with the boat on the

ground that, once their nationality was known, the news would travel faster than their barge, and result, probably, in their being intercepted.

Harold saw at once the reasonableness of their objection, and was inclined to give up the idea of capturing the flag of defiance, but Arthur and Ginger Venn would not hear of such a thing.

"If we get that flag of defiance," Arthur said, as he took his seat in the barge, "we shall have something to show for all the months we have been in the enemy's country. We must have it. Mustn't we, Ginger Venn?"

"Certainly, sir," Ginger Venn answered, emphatically.

Seeing that the Englishmen were determined to run the risk, Bah Pay commanded the men to take their seats, and as the boat flying the coveted flag approached they rowed out to intercept her. The Burman in command of the little war-boat, suspecting only that his countrymen were harmless villagers proceeding to the pagoda on the other side of the river, shouted to them to get out of the way. But, to his surprise, the men in the barge instead of increasing their stroke ceased to row, and a moment later the four Europeans, who had been hidden from view beneath the awning, moved out, and, standing up in the boat, each raised to his shoulder one of the rifles which Bah Pay had procured.

The excitement which their sudden appearance caused among the crew of the war-boat was extremely ludicrous. The man in command, seeing four rifles in the hands of

white men covering him, dropped down in a moment and endeavoured to conceal himself in the bottom of the boat. His crew made a frantic effort to follow his example, and their struggles to hide themselves set the boat rocking in a perilous fashion.

"It will capsize in a moment," Harold said to Bah Pay. "Tell the poor funky fellows that we don't intend to do them any harm."

Bah Pay did as he was desired, and immediately two or three heads peeped over the side of the war-boat. Evidently the owners of those heads informed their comrades that the white *kalas* had put down their rifles, for the remainder of the crew showed themselves immediately, and the captain, or whatever he called himself, salaamed and smiled cheerfully. But his smile faded away when the barge came alongside and Harold, stretching out his hand, grasped the flag of defiance and pulled it from its socket. Apparently he imagined that to be, in spite of the white men's promise not to harm them, the beginning of an attack. However, he was soon undeceived by Bah Pay commanding them to surrender their oars. They obeyed, reluctantly and with humble prayers that the white lords would leave them some.

"Let the poor rascals keep two," Harold said to Bah Pay. "It will take them a good time to get ashore with only two oars, and before they are able to raise an alarm we shall be a mile away."

So two oars were allowed the Burmans to keep control

over their war-boat, and when the others had been packed away at the bottom of the barge, Bah Pay gave the word of command and the Englishmen were once more reducing the distance that lay between them and Rangoon.

"It's a fine flag," Arthur admitted, as he and Harold examined the trophy, "and I mean to have one like it. We are sure to come across some more war-boats before long, and we'll attack the first one that's flying a flag."

Harold raised no objection to the suggestion, and Arthur commenced, at once, to keep a sharp look-out for flags of defiance. But it was not until two days later that he espied one, and that was flying at the stern of a big forty-oared boat.

"It wouldn't be wise to attempt to take that flag," Harold declared, in reply to Arthur's request that they should row over to her, "for it is impossible to guess how many men are on board the boat."

"Oh, bother the number of men," Arthur answered. "We shall be able to lick all that boat can hold, I'm sure."

"But suppose that we do not. Then, if we are not killed we shall be taken prisoners, and I dare say that this time we shall be made real slaves."

"Oh, never mind that. I want a flag of defiance as well as you, and if you don't help me to get that one it will be very mean of you."

"Are you in favour of attacking that boat, Ginger Venn?" Harold enquired, his mind already made up.

"Rather, sir," Ginger Venn answered, in a tone which showed that he was surprised at being asked such a question.

"Very well, then, we will attack her."

The men, at Bah Pay's command, now pulled their barge straight for the big Burmese boat, it being the Englishmen's intention to try to repeat the tactics which had been so successful two days previously. As on the former occasion they kept themselves concealed as much as possible under the awning, but evidently the men on the war-boat espied them, for they greeted the daring barge with a shower of bullets.

"Any one hit?" Harold asked, anxiously, when the splashing of bullets ceased.

"My lord, no one has been touched," Bah Pay replied, after glancing around the crew.

"That's famous. Now steady for a moment while we have a shot."

Bah Pay repeated the command to the rowers, who steadied the boat while Arthur, Harold, Ginger Venn and the Portuguese interpreter took aim. They fired almost simultaneously, and two of the enemy's crew fell forward, wounded if not killed.

"Now row like greased lightning," Harold shouted. "Go round her stern."

In obedience to this command the barge shot forward towards the war-boat, and passed almost scatheless through the second volley discharged at her. Before the enemy

could load and fire again the Englishmen's boat shot by the stern of the war-boat, and, as they passed, Arthur seized his *dah* and struck, with all his strength, the pole of the flag of defiance, cutting it clean in half. The flag fell into the water, but Arthur fished it out in a moment and waved it triumphantly about his head.

"Bravo ! Arthur," Harold exclaimed, not at all annoyed that his strategical plans for capturing the boat and thus securing the flag had been rendered superfluous. "We've got all we want, so now we must make a bolt."

The rowers, not at all sorry to get as far away as possible from their countrymen's rifles and *dahs*, pulled with more energy than they had hitherto shown, and the Englishmen's boat was ten yards ahead of the war-boat before the enemy had recovered from their surprise. They had expected the white men to board them, and for a moment or two imagined their flight to be a ruse. Soon they saw that it was a reality, and then they vowed to recapture their flag. But, although there were forty oarsmen to their boat, it was such a huge thing—in its building speed had been sacrificed to the desire for awe-inspiring demons' heads which adorned the fore—that they could not gain on the Englishmen's. The Burmans fired, but in their excitement their marksmanship was worse than ever and not one bullet reached its intended destination. So far as that boat was concerned the Englishmen had nothing to fear, but, unfortunately, the sound of firing had brought other Burmese war-boats on to the scene, and these started in



Arthur seized his *dah* and struck, with all his strength, the pole of the flag of defiance.

pursuit of their daring enemy. Others shot out from hidden creeks with the intention of cutting them off.

"It'll be warm work," Arthur said, as he once more loaded his rifle.

"It will," Harold agreed. "We must go straight ahead. That is our only chance."

Bullets were now splashing up the water all around the boat, and the foremost of the pursuers was close enough to hurl spears.

"Silence that chap," Harold commanded, and Ginger Venn, who had become a very fair shot, put a bullet through the man perched up on the big steering seat. Arthur fired also and smashed an oar. That boat slackened speed considerably, but others were pressing them hard. Some pulled right across their bow, believing that that would cause the Englishmen's boat to stop. But they were undeceived very quickly, for Harold was determined to go straight ahead and take his chance of coming safely out of collisions. The Burmese, however, were not disposed to run such risks, and when they found that the Englishmen intended to run them down they pulled out of the way in desperate haste, and contented themselves with firing at them as they passed.

But soon the chances of the Englishmen's escaping grew very small, for all along the river fresh boats were waiting to join in the attack and take up the pursuit. Moreover the rowers of the white men's boat were getting ex-

hausted and dispirited. Soon one fell forward, shot through the head.

"Take his oar, Bah Pay," Harold said, sharply, and Bah Pay removed the dead man and took his seat. And a minute or two later the Portuguese interpreter had to do a similar thing.

"If many more of them are hit," Harold said to Arthur and Ginger Venn, "it will be all over with us. Don't waste a shot."

There was scarcely any need to say that to Arthur and Ginger Venn, for they had been firing in a most careful way, and every bullet told on man or boat. Harold also took up a rifle again and began to fire, and the three of them picked off so many of the Burmese leaders that the majority of the boats had no recognised commander. But the fall of their leaders, instead of discouraging the Burmese, enraged them and made them more determined than ever to capture the white *kalas* and execute them in the most horrible way known to them.

Soon several of the Englishmen's rowers became too exhausted to pull, and the Burmese, seeing their condition, burst into loud, savage shouts of triumph.

"It's all up with us," Arthur declared, as the enemy's boats swarmed round them, "but don't let us surrender. Let us fight it out and die."

Harold nodded his full agreement with Arthur. Ginger Venn said nothing, but continued to load his rifle and fire it with the precision of a machine.

"Surrender, you dogs," the Burman in command of the nearest boat shouted to the Englishmen, but the only reply that he received was three bullets, each of which laid a man low.

"That was excellent," Harold exclaimed, and then added, "Hallo! what's up, now?"

No one in that boat could answer the question, although every man was amazed at what he saw. And that was only natural, for the Burmese suddenly ceased their aggression and rowed away at the highest speed they could attain. Most of the boats turned and went up river, but some made straight for land, the men jumping ashore and rushing into the jungle.

So surprised were the Englishmen at the sudden flight of the enemy, that for a minute or two they did nothing but gaze after them in bewilderment.

But Bah Pay had been seeking for the cause of his countrymen's flight, and had discovered it.

"My lords," he exclaimed, excitedly, "there are four boats coming up the river—English boats I think."

Arthur, Harold and Ginger Venn turned instantly and looked down the river.

"Yes, they are—they are," Arthur shouted, half mad with delight. "Hoorah!"

"Hoorah!" yelled Harold and Ginger Venn, while Bah Pay, the Portuguese interpreter and the whole of the oarsmen gave vent to their joy by waving their hands above their heads in a most excited fashion.

Then for a minute or two they watched, with their hearts full of thankfulness, the four English boats as they cut through the swift-flowing river. The life and dash of the British seamen was a grand sight, after being accustomed for some days to watching native oarsmen.

"Give them another cheer," Arthur said, excitedly, and led off with a "Hip! hip! hoorah!"

Evidently the British cheers astonished the men in the ships' boats, for although they answered them with a ringing "Hoorah!" there was a craning of necks and a spying through glasses on the part of the officer and the men in charge of the guns. The inspection of the fugitives' crew was not satisfactory, for the Europeans being dressed in Burmese costume were not recognised, and the "Hip! hip! hoorah!" was suspected, for a minute or so, of being a decoy cheer. But a little reflection convinced the officer in command that one Burmese boat could not possibly attempt to engage in action four English ones.

"Pull alongside her," he commanded, and his boat forged ahead and pulled up on the starboard side of the Burmese craft. And then Arthur and Harold saw to their great delight that the officer in command was a lieutenant of the *Fox*. They saluted immediately.

"Who are you?" the officer sang out, surprised to find two Burmans saluting with such smartness.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir," one of the sailors said, eagerly, "it's Mr. Drayton and Mr. Millett."

"What?" the lieutenant exclaimed in amazement, as he peered into Arthur and Harold's faces. "By Jupiter, that is so. Hallo, there! I thought that you boys were dead months ago."

"We were taken prisoners, sir," Arthur explained, "and since then we've been tramping all over the country. About a fortnight ago we escaped from Ava."

"By Jupiter, then you're the first white men that have done that."

"And we shouldn't have done it, sir," Harold joined in, "but for these gentlemen." And as he spoke he pointed to Bah Pay and the Portuguese interpreter.

The lieutenant gave a pleasant nod to the two men indicated, and then told Arthur and Harold to change into his boat.

"You'll be able to tell me some of your adventures on our way back," he added.

"We've another Englishman here, sir—Mr. Venn," Harold answered. "I suppose he may come aboard with us?"

"Certainly. Be quick."

The boats were now brought close alongside of each other, and the three Englishmen stepped quickly into the lieutenant's boat. Four sailors were then ordered into the Burmese boat, to take charge of her and bring her down the river.

In about a quarter of an hour the five boats reached

the *Fox's* tender, which was anchored in mid-stream in company with three small steamers which had been pressed into the service. Everyone on board the anchored vessels was anxious to hear what the distant firing had meant. The four ships' boats had been dispatched up stream to discover what was happening, and the explanation of the officer in command was awaited eagerly. He gave it aloud the very moment that he got aboard the *Fox's* tender.

"It was," he said, "a twenty-oared native boat commanded by three Englishmen fighting about twenty Burmese war-boats. It was as brave a fight as ever I've seen in my life."

Then he beckoned the Englishmen aboard, and when Arthur, Harold and Ginger Venn scrambled on deck, he said to his brother officers, "These, gentlemen, are the heroes of the fight."

Arthur and Harold were recognised at once, and congratulated heartily on having got safely back to the flotilla after so long an absence. But they took very good care that Ginger Venn should not be done out of his share of glory. They related the story of his perilous balloon voyage, of his two years' life as the Great Red Nat, and told of the prominent part that he had taken in all their adventures. Ginger Venn became a hero at once, and when he made a request to be taken on the strength of the *Fox*, it was granted immediately. And after the

second Burmese war came to an end, which it did some months later, he took part in many tough fights in other parts of the world.

Both Bah Pay and the Portuguese interpreter were liberally rewarded for their valuable services to Arthur, Harold and Ginger Venn, and settled down in Rangoon, which was now British territory. Bah Pay found that his missionary master had been released from prison by the English, and was looking forward to doing greater good under the new *régime*. He entered his service and remained with him until the missionary, enfeebled by long years of residence in an unhealthy climate, returned to England to die.

The Portuguese interpreter started business in Rangoon as a merchant, and took into his employ the surviving boatmen who had rowed him and his English friends in their exciting flight from Ava. They knew that if ever they entered the King of Burma's territory they would be executed immediately, so were quite content to live and die in Rangoon. Mounk Koon, also, found Rangoon a delightful refuge from the anger of his royal master, who vowed, when he discovered that his great victory over the English was a purely imaginary one, to roast him alive.

And what of Arthur and Harold? Well, they have both risen high in the service and have seen much warfare since their baptism of fire in Burma, as the rows of medals

on their uniforms testify. Their homes in beautiful Devon are adorned with trophies of their active service in the East and the West, but if you ask either of the admirals which he prizes most, he will point unhesitatingly to the Burmese "flag of defiance."

THE END

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